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WAIT FOR THE END.

A STORY.

BY

M A R K L E M O N.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON :
BRADBURY AND EVANS, 11, BOUVERIE STREET.
1863.

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LONDON:
BRADEURY AND EVANS, PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS.

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WAIT FOR THE END.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END—THE HALF-BROTHERS.

SEPTEMBER the 30th, 18—, was a great day for — College. It had scored 169 against 140 on the return match with M—, and as Gerard Norwold had bowled or caught out nine wickets in the first innings, and seven in the second, his “side” had invited him to supper at Charlie Craven’s, who was the fortunate possessor of the largest rooms in the College.

Gerard Norwold was what is usually called a good sort of fellow. He attended chapel and lectures pretty regularly, gave no great promise of future distinction, was a first-rate cricketer, a

good runner, an accomplished horseman, and had been known to drive a tandem. He was a general favourite, and those who knew him intimately had for him the warmest regard. His half-brother Gilbert was strikingly opposed to him in appearance and pursuits. He was an extravagant dresser, much given to purchasing showy jewellery, addicted to betting, billiards, and card-playing. Indeed, he carried his passion for the latter vice so far, that it had been rumoured more than once, that he and another man of the same College had made a bank for *rouge-et-noir*. He was known to have lost and won large sums, and his brother Gerard had often remonstrated with him on a course which had compelled frequent application to home for money, and led to more than one unpleasant interview with the College authorities. It had been hinted, also, that upon one occasion when a Newmarket favourite had died on the evening preceding the race, Gilbert Norwold, having had private information of the dangerous condition of the horse, had improved the occasion to his own advantage. The brothers

were in fact so widely separated by their tastes and dispositions, that they were rarely seen together, and Gilbert had not been asked to the supper-party at Charlie Craven's, although many men of other Colleges had received invitations.

At eight o'clock Charlie Craven's rooms were thrown open to receive company. His neat little camp bedstead was soon covered with the caps and hats of the guests, who scrambled for places, and gave assurance by their loud laughter and noisy ejaculations that a merry evening was to succeed to a day of triumph. Charlie Craven was called to the chair by acclamation, and as a matter of course, the guest of the evening, Gerard Norwold, occupied the place of honour beside him. The attractiveness of the viands produced a momentary lull in the vociferous storm which broke forth again with redoubled force during the distribution of the good things upon the table, and it was not until the entire party had settled down to their work of destruction that moderate weather prevailed. One generous fellow, however, who had come up the same year as Gerard,

and who had for his prowess and social qualities the highest admiration, was not to be quieted. He had knelt down in the Cricket-tent on the declaration of the score, and vowed "to pour a libation" whenever the name of Gerard Norwold should be mentioned that day. The necessity for fulfilling his vow had occurred so frequently, that a naturally strong head had yielded to the potency of the offerings, and continued to emit unlimited melody prematurely and vexatiously. At the persuasion of two judicious friends, Pylades consented to retire into the bed-room, and was subsequently reported to be as well as could be expected among the hats and caps on Charlie Craven's camp bedstead.

The tables having been cleared and glasses of divers fashions placed thereon, bowls of steaming Bishop and frothing milk-punch succeeded, and the revel began in earnest. When an assembly of orators insist on the right to be heard at the same time, it is difficult for the most practised ear to note accurately the gist of any individual speaker's observations, and as no conglomeration of words

would convey a notion of the universal conversation of Charlie Craven's guests, the reader must be content to remain as uninstructed as he would have been had he been present. At last something like unanimity prevailed, and the cry for a song rose above the general hubbub. The suggestion was favourably received, and the request so earnestly enforced that it seemed for some time that the demand was considered equal to the supply. By much hammering on the part of the Chairman and his adherents, and the loudest vociferations for silence on the part of the most persistent disturbers, vocal harmony prevailed.

The song had been heard a hundred times before within these old college walls, but its charm seemed undiminished by age, and could only have been indebted for its universal and university popularity to its unintelligibility.

Ex. gr.

“I'll sing you a one O ?
Green grow the rushes O !
What is your one O ?
When your one is all alone
It ever more shall be so.

“I'll sing you a two O !
Green grow the rushes O !
What is your two O ?
Two, two lily-white boys
Clothèd all in green O !
When your one is all alone
It ever more shall be so.”

And so on until it promised to monopolise the remainder of the evening. When the welcome cry of “Chori-us” was heard, every man gave tongue according to his fancy, producing a discord that would have driven the dummiest Mus: Doc: crazy. The applause which followed can only be fitly described as the concentrated essence of sound, and it was exciting to behold the glasses and candlesticks and other moveables upon the table dance to the drumming of the enraptured assembly.

The Chairman rose. His position was instantly acknowledged by many kind inquiries after his health, and the expression of anxious doubts, whether he felt himself equal to the situation. Having repeatedly and most good-humouredly satisfied his questioners upon both points, he made nine attempts to propose the toast of the evening, seldom getting further than “Gentlemen, I rise.”

Concluding at length that eloquence would be unappreciated at that moment, he contented himself with filling a goblet to the brim (*loud cheers*), and shouting as only an under-graduate can shout in a confined space and oppressive atmosphere, “Gerard Norwold’s health and wickets !”

Then up rose every man in answer to the pledge, and as

“ The war-horse at the trumpet’s sound,
Erects his mane and neighs and paws the ground,”

so each loud hurrah ! excited those convivial spirits to mount the chairs, and ultimately to set foot upon the tables, until the oppressed mahogany, staggering beneath the weight, upset one of the sconces into the Bishop bowl, and rendered unstable the positions of “ slip ” and “ longstop,” who, clinging to each other for support, fell together to the floor. Song followed song, and cheer succeeded cheer ; but amid all this merry riot not one unseemly word was spoken, nor was one ungentle act committed ; none “drunk, but nobly mad,” and all resulting from the unrestrained enjoyment of generous

natures, as yet uncorrupted and unsaddened by contact with the world.

It was now eleven o'clock, and the house rose. It became necessary to rouse Pylades from his slumber before Craven could "speed his parting guest." Pity, earnest pity, for the loss of such an evening saved Pylades from making atonement for smashed beavers and broken trenchers, and more than one generous hand proffered beakers of hock and soda or some more powerful stimulant.

Pylades—his name was Leyton, now perfectly recovered from his temporary obfuscation—and Gerard walked leisurely towards their respective rooms in the quadrangle. The night was sultry, and many of the windows were opened, though lights shone only from two or three.

"My brother has a visitor to-night," said Gerard, as they approached a room on the ground-floor, and whose window was open and lighted from within. Gerard drew aside the curtain with the intention of wishing his brother and his guest good night. Before he could

speak, however, something he saw in his brother's room alarmed or distressed him so greatly, that he seized Leyton's arm as though to save himself from falling. Leyton naturally inquired the cause of this sudden change; but Gerard remained silent, still grasping the arm of his friend and hurrying from the window.

When they reached Leyton's rooms, Gerard asked for drink of any kind, and it was not until he had emptied a large water-goblet filled with wine that he appeared capable of speech.

“Leyton,” he said, “if what I have seen to-night in my brother's room be true, I and he and all of us who bear his name are most unhappy. Ask me nothing more to-night, but I promise you, that if I require aid or counsel, I will come to you. Do not go to bed for half an hour—I may return.”

Gerard hastened to his brother's room. The light still shone within, but the outer door was closed and fastened. Gerard knocked violently, and called for admission at the same time. When Gilbert opened the door, he was evidently startled

at the expression of his brother's face, and could not forbear asking what had happened? Gerard did not reply, but seated himself at the table where a freshman, named Mariott, was sitting, half stupefied by the strong wine he had drank and the excitement of the play in which he had been engaged, evidently, as there were cards upon the table.

"Well, Mariott," said Gerard, as soon as he could speak, "you will not listen to advice; you will not be warned, but are here again losing your money, and muddling your brains."

"Is that all you have come to say?" remarked Gilbert. "The morning would have been time enough, surely, for lectures."

Gerard did not reply to his brother, but spoke on. "You have lost again to-night, Mariott; you have lost largely."

"I can pay what I have lost, Mr. Norwold," said Mariott rising, and taking a roll of notes from a silken note-case, he counted about thirty pounds and threw them upon the table.

"Take that money again, Mariott," said

Gerard—"at least until to-morrow—until my brother asks you for it."

"I always pay my debts of honour immediately," answered the half tipsy loser, "and I allow no one to dictate to me on such a matter. Good night, Norwold, it is getting late, and as your brother seems disposed for a family row, I am in the way—Good night."

Gilbert did not seek to stay Mariott, but when he had gone he closed the door, and turning abruptly to his brother, said :

"Gerard Norwold, attend to what I am about to say. If we are to continue on terms of friendship, you must leave off these impertinent meddlings and intrusions. I admit no right of yours to choose my friends or to regulate my amusements. You have your pursuits, I have mine, and if I am again annoyed as I have been to-night, I shall cut with you altogether."

"Have you done?" asked Gerard, after a pause.

"For the present," was the reply.

"Then hear me, Gilbert Norwold, and perhaps for the last time. Did you not bear my father's

name, you should not hear me at all, and I would cut with *you* altogether ; but as anything which affects your honour affects him—affects me—I have come here to-night with the determination to check you in your disgraceful practices, and compel you to make reparation to those whom you have injured.”

Gilbert’s face became livid, and his lips trembled either with rage or with the dread of the revelation his brother was about to make. He was not left long in suspense.

“ Gilbert Norwold, you are a cheat, a mean despicable cheat. Don’t speak ! Don’t move. I am the stronger man, and I will hold you in your chair and tell you of your villainy. You have won large sums of the poor idiot who has just left us, not only by your greater skill in such miserable acquirements, but by stooping to play unfairly. You would deny it—I see it in your face—but I have had the evidence of my own eyes to prove this horrible accusation. Passing your window to-night, I drew aside the curtain to wish you a brotherly good night—I

saw you deliberately place at your back one card and substitute for it another which you had previously placed behind you. I heard you exclaim 'Game again!' and what I saw—what I heard, I dare no more keep secret, nor would I, than I would the knowledge of a murder."

Gilbert was taken completely by surprise. He did not dare even to deny his brother's accusation, and could only stammer out—"So, Mr. Gerard Norwold descends to play the spy upon me."

"Tush!" exclaimed Gerard, "I have told you how I came by my knowledge of your dis-honour, and you believe me. Now, no evasion. You had better be truthful for the future. How much have you won of Mariott?"

Gilbert made no reply, but stood gazing sulkily upon the ground.

"Gilbert, this matter shall not rest until restitution has been made. If you have not the means of doing so, let me assist you. If you refuse, I have only one other course. I shall communicate with our father. You know him—you know that if he found you capable of

this crime, he would turn you on the world, even if it broke his own proud heart to do so."

Gilbert still remained silent.

"What is your determination?" asked Gerard, after a pause of some moments.

"One question," said Gilbert. "Would you, supposing I deny this charge—would you, regardless of my mother—I do not say of me—would you tell this to my father?"

It was now Gerard's turn to be silent for some moments. He then said, taking his brother's hand, "Gilbert, your question, I am sure, does not require an answer. You will not make such an alternative possible. You will trust your brother, and tell me the worst. I will help you to the uttermost. Come! do not hesitate. Speak the truth."

Gilbert went to his writing-desk, and from a secret drawer within it, brought forth a small note-book in which he had put down his late card winnings and his earlier losses.

The latter had been large, and not until the name of Mariott appeared on the page had his

gains been great. Gerard, after a time, his distress rendering calculation difficult, reckoned up the sums Gilbert had obtained from his victim, and the total reached to nearly two hundred pounds.

“The amount is large,” said Gerard, “larger than I had expected, but it must be paid. We must write home for money.”

“That will be useless,” replied Gilbert, “at least so far as I am concerned. Sir John has refused to send me more. I have had money unknown to you, for I have lost considerably by betting, and the trustees of one of my tradesmen have been pressing me. I can get no more.”

“You must ask your mother, then, for help,” said Gerard.

Gilbert shook his head. “Useless! useless!” he replied. “Her pin-money is not great, and I have already had a hundred pounds from her.”

Gerard was puzzled. “I dare not ask for more than fifty pounds, as I promised not to exceed my allowance. What is to be done?”

“There is one chance,” said Gilbert, after a pause. “Jasper Jellifer has lent me money at

times, and which my mother has repaid him.—He may have the means to help *us*.”

Gerard looked up suddenly.

“I mean help me, although he told me that my mother’s security was of no value. I think he would assist if he had your promise to see him repaid. In fact he said as much.”

Gerard held out his hand to Gilbert, and instantly proffered to do all that was required provided the money could be obtained.

“Very well, then,” said Gilbert. “I will write to him to-morrow, and go down to Morden on the following day, and if I find Sir John away from home, I will see my mother.”

The course of action having been determined, Gerard proceeded at once to write the letter. He was unskilled in such compositions, and it was not until he had made more than one attempt that he succeeded in completing the important document.

It was comprised in three short lines, with Gerard’s signature attached, and yet it changed the current of more lives than one.

Leyton remained at his open window waiting the return of Gerard, his well-beloved friend. "All right, old boy," said Gerard, very cheerfully. "I cannot tell you what I have been saying to Gilbert: but it's all right. Good night."

Often and often, in after years, Gerard Norwold remembered this parting from his true Pylades, and regretted bitterly his silence upon what had passed in his brother's rooms.

Gilbert put out his lamp, and threw himself upon his bed dressed as he was. He could not sleep, but again and again he went over the exciting scene just enacted, and strange unthankfulness! he always ended by repeating Gerard's words: "I have only one other course, I shall communicate with our father."

That thought was the last in his mind when he fell asleep.

CHAPTER II.

INTRODUCES JACK SPRAGGATT AND HIS SKELETON,
JASPER JELLIFER, AND THE MILLER RAY.

No one entering Morden at its north end could fail to observe a large old-fashioned house, built, it was said, as early as the time of James the First. On one side was a large pond, whereon floated plump geese and ducks, like argosies, to be freighted hereafter with savoury stuffing, whilst overhead blue-rocks and runts, jacobines, nuns, and tumblers were gyrating and traversing to and fro from a spacious dovecote, surmounted by a gilt vane. Its sloping roof, covered with grey stone healing, dotted here and there with tufts of stone-crop and houseleek, harmonised well with its white front, relieved by oak frame-work, painted black, and filled with latticed windows. A large porch of carved oak, with seats on either side, and partly concealed by creeping rose-trees and jasmine,

marked the principal entrance, which was approached from the road by a broad gravel path, bordered by flower beds and well kept lawns, studded about with clumps of evergreens and flowering shrubs. Two giant elms, which overshadowed the garden gate, gave their name to the place, which had been occupied for several generations by the family of the Spraggatts, but the freehold itself belonged to Sir John Norwold. The homestead of the farm was near the house, partly hidden by a grove of elms, whereon a colony of rooks had been long established. We shall have much to do presently with the inmates of this old house, now occupied by John Spraggatt—Jack Spraggatt he was called usually—his widowed mother, and two fair sisters.

The Elms was about half a mile from the High Street of the neighbouring town, which extended nearly to its boundary meadow. Morden was an improving place, and had taken a fancy to march southwards, so that the High Street, which had formerly been the principal place of trade, had fallen into poverty, being

separated from the thriving market place and New Street by the bridge, which crossed the shallow river flowing through the town. The Town Hall, however, still gave an importance to High Street; and at election times, or on corporation festivals and ceremonials, the old street held up its head again, and claimed its place in Morden. The houses in the market place had grown up at various dates, and had been built without any attempt at uniformity, so that the old church, which stood in one corner, and had been frequently repaired and beautified, according to the taste of the church-wardens for the time being, did not appear such a mass of incongruity as it would have done had its neighbours been more regular in their construction. The shaft of the old cross had been kept in tolerable repair since its conversion to protestantism, and looked picturesque enough on market days when surrounded by the butter sellers, generally farmers' daughters, and who always appeared, if not in their Sunday clothes, at least in their second best. We miss those rustic beauties sadly now-

a-days from English market-places : they passed away when Capital bought up the small farmers, and turned out their little households to seek for other occupations, or new homes in the new world. The old farm-houses and their small home-steads still remain here and there, but changed, how changed ! from what they were. The parlour-kitchen, with its clean brick floor, the cosy ingle, where the bright iron dogs glistened in the sun in summer time, giving place in winter to those of ruder make, when the crackling log blazed upon the hearth, the well-stored bacon-rack above your head, that told of savoury broils adorned with eggs like marigolds, the corner cupboard, which hid away the choicest crockery (heir-looms reserved for high days and holidays), the well-polished oaken dresser, on whose shelves were ranged pewter and blue delft plates, kept for the same high occasions ;—(the wooden platter was thought good enough for working days ;)—the square rush-bottomed chairs, broad enough to seat a Falstaff at his ease ; the eight-day clock, whose tick—the voice of time—could,

in the stillness of the night, be heard in distant chambers—are only memories. The carter and the ploughman, hard worked and ill paid, are now the men in possession, and manage someway to labour and live. No doubt the change is for the better; all changes are so now-a-days; but those were not evil times, when the rustic toiler was certain of a coarse breakfast and supper of bull-broth and brown bread, a liberal dinner of fat bacon and strong cabbage in the farmer's outer kitchen, and a hard, warm bed, in the farmer's garret. God helps those toilers some way in our money-loving times, as they bear their lot so patiently.

In one corner of the market place was the shop of Jasper Jellifer. He was not particular as to the commodities he sold, and they ranged from peppermint drops to mill-stones. There were few wants of the farmer or the farmer's womankind that Jasper could not satisfy out of his *omnium gatherum* of a shop, and being a smooth-spoken fellow, he rarely lost a customer that had once given him a trial. He was a shrewd man, no

doubt, and never took his eye off the main chance, as it is called, and when his neighbours had small difficulties which baffled their own ingenuity to overcome, Jasper was the man they consulted. When asked, he always gave advice, generally of a practical character, and the knowledge he thus obtained concerning many of his neighbours' affairs, invested him with an influence which he failed not to turn to his own profit. Always in a fair way, however, for though Jasper was known to drive a hard bargain, he gave good weight and just measure in all things. Still he was not a popular man with his fellow town's folk, with whom he rarely sought a close intimacy, and many who had profited by his shrewdness and caution, spoke of Jasper as a screw or a close-shaver, or a money-grubber, and in truth he deserved those appellations, for no man ate at his board or drank of his cup. Philanthropic ladies and gentlemen in those days had not learned the art of being charitable at the expense of other people's pockets, or they would have called in vain on Jasper Jellifer. When a fire destroyed the tools

of seven poor carpenters, and the market place made a subscription, Jasper avoided giving a shilling on the pretence that he had no change, and declined to put his name to the subscription list in^{*} case he should forget it. Being much pressed, at last he contributed in kind, and presented a few second-hand tools for the benefit of the sufferers. He did love money, no doubt of it, and the passion became stronger and stronger as he grew older and richer.

We said that no man ever shared his hospitality. We retract. We should have said that Raymond Ray, the miller, was Jasper's crony, and of late had been a frequent visitor and guest. And this intimacy was somewhat strange, as Ray was not a native of the place, but had come from the neighbourhood of London to work the water-mill outside the town. Nobody knew anything about him, but he was a pushing fellow, and having money at his command, he soon made his way with the good people of Morden. He was rather a loose liver, it was said, and, being a bachelor, and seemingly inclined

to keep so, the scandal-mongers over their gossip-water did not spare him. His mill was turned by the stream which flowed through Norwold Park, and formed a pretty object as seen from the library window of the Hall. Looking also from the footbridge which crossed the water near the entrance to the park, it would have made a good subject for a painter. Some limes planted upon the margin of the stream had grown aslant until their lowermost boughs dipped into the water, and through these sylvan arches the old wheel could be discerned splashing, splashing and scattering the water-drops about like some prodigal distributing fairy diamonds. The house attached to the mill was overgrown with ivy, and had a gable end, with latticed windows, which almost overhung the mill-stream. The holly hedge by which it was surrounded was neatly clipped, and like most miller's gardens, Ray's was a mass of flowers and shrubs.

It had been a rare sight at one time to have seen Jasper Jellifer away from his shop, except on business, but since his intimacy with Ray he

might be found once, and even twice a-week in the dusk of the evening walking in the miller's garden, although he was known to care nothing for flowers, or indeed for little else in which he did not traffic.

“A primrose by the river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more.”

He was there one evening earnestly reading a book—it was bound in rough calf with a brass clasp—as he walked up and down, when a farmer rode up to the mill.

“Hallo!” cried the new-comer, looking over the garden hedge. “Jasper Jellifer, as I live! What are you studying, man—the Ready Reckoner, or the Art of Short Mensuration?”

“Neither, Master Spraggatt,” replied Jasper, smiling, and putting the volume into his pocket. “I'm studying a leaf out of your book, Sir, and learning the art of being idle.”

“You're too old and too knowing to go to my school,” said Jack Spraggatt, dismounting and fastening his horse's bridle to a ring in the gate

post. Before he could open the wicket, however, Jasper was at the entrance.

“Ray is at home, I suppose?” remarked Jack.

“Yes—I believe so—that is, he was here just now,” answered Jasper, with some hesitation of manner, which, however, was not noticed by his questioner.

As Jack’s business was with the miller and not with Jasper, for whom he entertained no great respect, the young man made his way at once for the house. As he did so he observed there was a light in the miller’s parlour, or counting house, but on Jasper calling out, “Mr. Ray!” it was extinguished instantly. Jack thought nothing of this until he reached the door, when he heard the lid of an iron chest, which he knew stood in one corner of the miller’s room, close with a noise, as though it had been shut down hastily.

“What’s in the wind, I wonder?” thought Jack. “Jasper wouldn’t be idling away his time here for nothing, and Ray evidently did not want to make me as wise as himself.”

Whatever the mystery, there was no reading

it in the miller's face, for when he opened the door he looked as beaming and spoke as cheerily as any man could, who was fresh from the accomplishment of some good action.

"I hardly expected you here to-night, Mr. Spraggatt," said Ray; "but come in and try our last brewing. Unless," added the miller, opening the parlour door and leading the way, "you prefer a glass of French brandy or Dutch Hollands; I have both at hand."

Jack preferred the ale, and the miller's hand-maiden soon brought in a foaming jug of nut-brown stingo which would have astonished the degenerate topers of bitter beer. Jack had come to make a bargain for the sale of some wheat, for which the miller had offered a price some shillings below its value. Buyers, however, were scarce, and Jack wanted money. So did Ray, at least that was his excuse for the badness of his offer, and he could only buy by borrowing at interest, and therefore the wheat must pay the loss.

Jack's need was urgent, for unless he paid some money at next day's market his credit would be

damaged, if not lost altogether. Ray knew this also, and professed to become a purchaser more to oblige Mr. Spraggatt than from any hope of gain by the transaction. There was nothing for it but to take the miller's price, and the little sample bag of wheat was drawn forth from Jack's pocket with a sigh that told a tale which few suspected who knew the light-hearted farmer on his daily walk, for Jack Spraggatt had a cheerful smile and pleasant word for all, even when night had brought no sleep, and the light but small comfort.

Ray had left the room to get so much of the money as was needed for the morrow, and Jasper Jellifer's presence at the mill was accounted for by the young farmer, when he heard the miller call his name.

Ray was absent a short time, and when he returned he brought with him a lighted candle, for the evening had closed in. The usual formalities gone through, and two hundred pounds safely deposited in the breast pocket of Jack's coat, he rose to take his departure.

As he did so, something sparkling on the ground caught his eye, and to his surprise he picked up a diamond ring—a lady's diamond ring.

"Ha! how careless of me," cried the miller, almost snatching the waif from Jack's fingers. "I would not have lost that ring for a hundred pounds. It was my—my mother's. Thank you, Mr. Spraggatt."

Jack knew the ring did not belong to him, and therefore believed the miller's story without further question, but Ray scarcely spoke another word until they reached the garden gate and bade each other good night.

Jack Spraggatt rode on with a full pocket and a heavy heart, for he knew that many bargains similar to the one he had made that evening would complete his ruin.

Jack had many friends, some of them true friends, as the world goes—and was always sure of a welcome. He had great natural spirits and a happy-looking face, two things which pass current for much more than they are worth too

often. Many who had returned his cheery greeting or valediction had envied the happy Jack, and wondered how he managed to put aside Care, or to avoid the old carker altogether. Had they peeped under his hat as he rode or walked along, solitarily, they would have seen a bent brow and a sad face that told of sorrow hidden from all, perhaps, and known to himself alone. Whatever it was that was gnawing at his peace, like the Spartan boy, he hid his destroyer bravely.

To see Jack at his own table was to see him in his glory. His aged mother seated in the place of honour, and on either side a blooming sister, kindly careful of their frequent guests, whilst Jack filled a chair which death had made vacant some three years before our story, by taking away the kind grey headed man who had loved that household dearly—aye, too dearly.

No shade of sadness then! No word, no look to pain that widowed mother and those trusting sisters, nothing to mar the bright hopes that mingled ever with the talk of Letty's coming nuptials—she was the elder of the two—or that

sought to check the prodigal love which was so lavish in devising adornments for the happy bride. Ray's purchase would empty the bays of the great barn, and when that sorrow was passed, they should be covered over with green boughs and flowers, and all should

“ Go merry as the marriage bells.”

Yet Jack had a great skeleton in his cupboard —larger than that of the Irish giant—or the mastodon even, and it would come out in the still night and terrify him into wakefulness. It would greet him in early morning as soon as his eyes were open, it would often and often look at him from behind his mother's and sisters' chairs, and scare him for a moment; but Jack, by a cheerful look and a merry word would drive it away, to meet it perhaps again when he smoked his pipe walking among the flowers in the garden, or sitting in the rose-covered porch, and at other times when he ought to have been most happy.

This grim attendant was none of Jack's own seeking. It was bequeathed to him by his father, who told him the day before he died never to let

his mother see the unsightly thing, but to hide it from her, if possible, until the time came when she should lie down to rest in the green church-yard. Jack obeyed his father, although it made his young life at times a blank, and closed his heart against a love which knocked at it loudly for two long years, and which turned away at last to find another home. Now and then, when the malign influence became almost intolerable, he had thought of asking Lucy—his favourite sister Lucy, to share with him in part this terrible knowledge; but fearing that it might become as fatal to her and to her peace, as it had long been to him and to his happiness, he elected to bear it alone, and until the end, if that were needful.

Jack found two neighbours awaiting his return from the mill, and a merry supper was the result. The young ladies and Jack were excellent singers of homely songs and glees and catches, and one of the guests prided himself on the profundity of his bass. So they sang some old part-songs, such as years and years ago the early tenants of that

ancient dwelling had sung under the same oak roof-tree, and whose delighted ghosts perhaps still hovered around, and wagged their spectral jaws to an inaudible chorus.

Mrs. Spraggatt had retired to rest somewhat before the party broke up, although the clock struck ten only as the two guests departed. Jack went to his little sitting-room, adjoining the one they had just left, with the intention of depositing his money in an oak box where he kept his account books, but found that his mother had the key. As she was now asleep, possibly, he took his treasure to bed with him. The mirthfulness of the last hour or two had scared Jack's skeleton into its cupboard, and the young farmer soon fell into a sound but short slumber. When he awoke, the moonlight was shining on his face, and had helped to rouse him, he thought. Rasper, the house-dog, was barking at intervals down at the homestead, but that was his custom, whenever Jack forgot to unloosen him, and he had done so that night. The weather cock on the pigeon-house was creaking sadly. That was

strange! because Jack had seen it oiled not a week ago. Yet it did creak, and that continuously. There was a fox or a strange dog about the place, no doubt, for Rasper was very noisy, and Jack had half a mind to get out of bed and silence him, but sleep was stealing over him, the creaking of the weather-cock had ceased, and so what evil was at work that night remained unseen by Jack Spraggatt.

He found it out in the morning, however, and fearing to alarm his mother and his sisters, never talked of it until years and years afterwards, when he and one other were alone in a far-off land—alone in a great wilderness sitting at night by a bright wood fire.

Jack discovered in the morning that two men (there were the foot-prints of two men) had filed the catch of the window of his little room—(he thought it was the creaking of the weather-cock), and having entered, had forced open the lid of his oak box, and thrown all his books and papers upon the ground. Nothing else was disturbed. Nothing stolen.

Jack replaced his books and papers, took off the catch of the window, and thought how good a thing it was to have friendly neighbours look in to compel one to make merry sometimes in spite of oneself. Had Mrs. Spraggatt not taken the key of the oak box to bed with her, Jack would have lost the bank-notes he had obtained at such a sacrifice.

CHAPTER III.

JASPER JELLIFER PROPOSES TO PLAY FOR A GREAT STAKE, AND THE MILLER SHARES THE RISK.

NORWOLD HALL, the residence of Sir John Norwold, was a fine old building, of somewhat later date than Elizabeth's time, but partaking of some of the architectural characteristics of that period, when fortified houses were growing into disuse, although the great mansions still preserved traces of caution, and appearance of strength. Its large bay windows were partly filled with stained glass, depicting the armorial bearings of the house of Norwold, and of those families who had been united to it by marriage in the time of its greater prosperity—its fortunes were more humble at the time of our story. In its great hall, cavaliers had mustered to do battle for King Charles, and many keen sportsmen had gathered, often “to boot, and to saddle,” and to “burn

powder" in sylvan warfare. The grounds about the hall had been extensive at one time, and there was still much that told of their past glories. Thick yew hedges, broad enough to allow the construction of bowers in their midst, proclaimed themselves to be the growth of more than one century, and there were terraces of green turf, whereon, so tradition said, Henrietta had once walked in queenly pride and beauty, and many other stately dames, also, in after time, when Norwold Hall had been the scene of a large hospitality. The approach to the house was by a gentle rise, and through an avenue of noble trees, once all but condemned to become timber, by the needy politician who had lately held possession, but family pride cancelled the sentence.

The park was only separated from the town of Morden by a stream which flowed through it, turning Ray's mill in its course to the adjoining river.

Many of the smaller houses in Morden were the property of Sir John Norwold. They had

been bought by the present Sir John's father for election purposes, and were invariably occupied by "free men," who, when tractable, were desirable tenants before the Reform Bill deprived them of much of their birth-rights. The management of those political serfs had been long intrusted to one David Locke, a small corn-dealer, but a shrewd fellow, and a first-rate pot-house politician. He was in his way a diminutive "man in the moon," and managed matters so cleverly, that his votes defied scrutiny. The borough had been frequently and hotly contested, but David Locke's man was always at the head of the poll, and the means by which his victories were obtained were never doubted. He brought up his men in shoals whenever occasion required them, and he ticked them off as they polled with most annoying effrontery. His mode of bargaining was unique and open. The Rock Club, held at a small public-house in Morden, was composed of certain free and independents who were banded together for their own interests and security,

contriving by their combination to keep up the price of votes and prevent any underselling of each other. On the eve of an election, the Club met, and invited Mr. David Locke to attend, and state the political opinions of his candidate. When pipes and beer, those necessary adjuncts to deliberation, had been supplied, Mr. David Locke rose, stick in hand, and proceeded to business.

“Gentlemen of the Rock Club,” he would say, “I am here to solicit your votes and interest for Mr. Blank. As time is of consequence to all of us, I will at once state the opinions of my principal. He is a man of his word, and his political opinions extend to —.” Here he would give two blows with his stick upon the table.

This declaration would be always highly unsatisfactory to the meeting, and loud cries of “Oh! no! that won’t do!” compelled the orator to proceed.

“Mr. Blank, gentlemen, is not an obstinate man, unwilling to be guided in some way by the opinions of his constituents, and therefore, I do

not hesitate to say for him”—three blows with the stick followed by more dissatisfaction.

“There is reason in roasting eggs,” Mr. Locke, would continue, “and, gentlemen, I can assure you, that Mr. Blank will retire from the contest—and will do so with my concurrence, and by my advice, unless you are satisfied with”—five blows of the stick.

The fathers of the club would then put their wicked old heads together, and whisper mysteriously for a few minutes. During their deliberation, Mr. David Locke resumed his hat, buttoned up his coat, every button, and placing his divining rod under his arm, awaited calmly the result of the conference. If the chairman of the club then struck five times upon the table, Mr. David Locke again removed his hat, and repeated the mystic number of blows. If on the other hand the chairman exceeded that number by only one tap, Mr. David Locke looked his contempt of the assembly, and retired without a word. Need we say, that the blows upon the table indicated the number of guineas at which Mr.

Locke was willing to have those political brutes knocked down to him ?

The late Baronet, Sir Robert Norwold, had been a great House of Commons man, and had contested three elections for Morden, paying so dearly for his whistle, that when he died, his estate was found to be greatly encumbered. Sir John, his son and successor, set to work to get back as much of his father's outlay in bribery as he could by pinching his tenants to the uttermost. Those free and independent persons had been so long used to pay their rent in kind, that it was no easy matter to make them recognise the new order of things, and pay in money ; and Mr. David Locke found his political influence diminishing daily by the intrusion of the broker and his myrmidons into the dwellings of the recusant tenants. But being one of those practical philosophers who decide that half a loaf is better than none, Mr. Locke, determined to take care of himself, and arranged with Sir John Norwold to allow him a good commission for collecting his rents in specie and

promises; so after awhile matters went on pretty smoothly.

We have said thus much of Mr. David Locke, as a sudden illness threatened to close his rather equivocal career, and leave his collectorship open to a successor. The precarious condition of Mr. Locke was known to very few persons only, and Jasper Jellifer was one. The collectorship had been long desired by the persevering Jasper, and had Mr. Locke's illness not been so sudden and dangerous, he had intended to have devised some plan to have obtained, at some future day, the reversion.

Jasper Jellifer had always been a lucky man, and fortune had not tired of serving him. Sir John Norwold was well known to be a proud, selfish, overbearing man, and most of his deeds of good or evil were referable to the state of his temper for the time being. Jasper was afraid of Sir John.

Lady Norwold was a second wife, and had been promoted to that position from a respectable but rather humble condition, and her recognition by

Sir John was more that of a superior house-keeper than of one whom he had promised to endow with all his worldly goods, and to cherish and comfort to the end of their mutual lives. It seemed, therefore, hardly possible to induce a lady so circumstanced, to interfere on behalf of a person who was only known to her as a small tradesman that occasionally received the honour of her custom.

But Jasper Jellifer was a lucky man, and a letter of introduction was put into his hand by the postman. It bore the Cambridge post-mark, and the handwriting appeared familiar to him. He retired into his back parlour before breaking the seal, and was gratified to find that the letter was from Gilbert Norwold. It was earnestly worded, and urgently requested the immediate loan of 200*l*. The largeness of the amount made Jasper start. The letter went on to say, “ So great is the necessity for this money that I am sure my mother, Lady Norwold, will guarantee the repayment when I can explain circumstances to her. My brother Gerard is also so

concerned in this matter that he will give his written undertaking to see the money repaid. I shall follow this letter to-morrow and be with you at night, when I trust to find you prepared to help me." Jasper read and re-read the letter, and then thought over the course he should pursue. To lend so large a sum, even if he had the money, on such security, would be absurd. Nevertheless the letter empowered him to see Lady Norwold; and out of an interview and the knowledge of her son's necessities, something might arise to obtain her intercession with Sir John for the desired collectorship. He dressed himself in his best, and started at once for the Hall. He walked briskly, and as he passed under the grand old trees which formed the avenue leading to the house, visions of future advancement and larger gains presented themselves. The collectorship once obtained, other trusts might follow, and some day Jasper Jellifer might aspire to be steward of the Norwold properties. Two hundred pounds was a large sum to invest on such a dream. A spendthrift's promise

was soon forgotten, and Lady Norwold was slenderly dowered. A quarter of that sum would show his willingness to help, and give him a hold upon the lady's gratitude. Well, there was time enough to decide, after he had seen her ladyship. He went to the servant's entrance, but as it was forbidden to have strangers in the offices, he was shown into the great Hall, there to wait until Sir John and Lady Norwold had finished breakfast. As he sat there, patiently, he fancied he heard Sir John speaking loud and angrily, and when the door of the breakfast room was opened by the footman who had been in attendance, his conjecture was confirmed. The footman shrugged his shoulders, and made a grimace at Jasper, whom he knew, saying :

“The old game! Sir John’s in a towering rage—his temper gets worse and worse. You haven’t come to see him, I hope?”

“No,” replied Jasper; “but I want to see her ladyship very particular.”

“I don’t expect she’ll see you or anybody this morning—she never does after these rows. I

don't envy 'her ladyship,' I can tell you," said the footman.

"What's the matter?" asked Jasper.

"Oh, the old story—money. Master Gerard has writ home for £50, and Sir John has gone into fits about it. He says it's all Master Gilbert's fault a setting him a bad example, and that Lady Norwold encourages 'em in extravagance. Hark! he's a coming out," and the prudent footman retreated with an alacrity that was surprising, considering his full condition.

The door of the breakfast-room was thrown open by Sir John, who paused to say:

"Now write and tell them so, Madam. Tell them both that I'll not give them a pound more than their allowance. If I do——" here followed a coarse expletive which at that time was not so uncommon as to be thought brutal, even by those to whom it was addressed.

Jasper wished himself back in the market-place, but retreat was impossible.

"Well, who are you?" cried Sir John. "Oh,

I see ! the chandler's shop-keeper—Well, what do you want ?”

Jasper was nearly bewildered, but as the collectorship was uppermost in his head, he stammered out—“Mr. Locke, Sir John, is dangerously ill—dying, I believe, Sir John ——.”

“So much the better !” interrupted the fiery old gentleman. “If he had died forty years ago it would have been all the better for me. An old bribery-monger. How do you know he's dying ?”

“Please, Sir John, the doctor was with him three times yesterday——.”

“That's enough—sent any message to me ?”

“No, Sir John, but——”

“Then why the devil do you stop me here talking——.” Luckily for Jasper, at this moment the gardener's boy was discerned by the passionate Baronet wheeling a barrow across the lawn, and as this was a proceeding strictly against orders, Sir John rushed out, his angry voice and the howling of the boy giving assurance that the prohibition was being forcibly impressed on the

memory of the delinquent. Jasper] sank down upon the hall-settle, almost resolved to abandon the coveted interview, but the fear of meeting Sir John on his way through the park kept him sitting. At last, to Jasper's great relief, he saw the dreaded old gentleman ride down the avenue, and if the truth be told, he cared not whither.

When Lady Norwold passed into the hall, Jasper noticed that she had been weeping, but his self-interest was too much concerned to admit of any display of delicacy on his part. He, therefore, advanced towards her, almost calling, "My lady!" Lady Norwold stopped, and Jasper instantly opened his business.

"I beg pardon, my lady, but I want to speak to your ladyship for a few minutes."

"I am rather indisposed, Mr. Jellifer, just now and must trouble you to call again——."

"But my business is very pressing, my lady," said Jasper. "I have a letter from your son, Mr. Gilbert."

"From my son?" said Lady Norwold. "My son written to you? Pray follow me," and she

led the way into a small room which she usually occupied when alone.

“Did I understand you rightly, that you had a letter from my son, Mr. Gilbert?” asked her ladyship, seating herself as though her anxiety already oppressed her.

“Yes, my lady,” replied Jasper. “A letter which has perplexed me a great deal, I can assure your ladyship; and I thought it my duty to come on to you at once, my lady. Here is the letter, which will speak for itself.”

Lady Norwold drew a deep sigh before she ventured to read a communication which, she feared, would bring her more sorrow. As she read on, large tears fell upon the paper, and when she had finished she hid her face in her handkerchief and sobbed aloud. Jasper was very sorry to witness her distress, for he thought he could not very well touch upon the collectorship at present, and he dreaded the return of Sir John.

“This is a very sad, sad letter,” said Lady Norwold, after a pause of some moments, “and

will go nigh to break my heart, unless Gilbert has some satisfactory explanation to give. What do you propose to do, Mr. Jellifer? Is it in your power to help my unhappy boy?"

"Why really, your ladyship," said Jasper, hardly expecting such a point blank question so early in the interview, "I assure your ladyship that it is quite out of my power to do what Mr. Gilbert requires."

"Then why did you come to me? Why did you come to give me pain, if you have not the power to help my poor son?"

Jasper saw all his new-blown hopes fading away if he hesitated. *

"Your ladyship would not hear me to an end," said Jasper. "I was about to say that I would see Mr. Gilbert, and hear if he really wants so much as £200. If fifty would help him, and I have your ladyship's promise of repayment, I would try—yes, I would try to advance that sum."

"Thanks, Mr. Jellifer—Mr. Gilbert must make that sum sufficient, for I do not hesitate to

tell you that Sir John is tired of supplying his sons'—both his sons'—extravagances, and that I am myself subjected to much annoyance on their account. Sir John is very unreasonable at times, and is not particular upon whom he vents his ill temper. I knew when you gave me that letter that it was about money. As I read how dear Gilbert's imprudence was distressing him, poor boy, and saw how large was the amount required to release him from his difficulties, I was perfectly overcome, knowing that I am almost penniless at present. Mr. Jellifer, you will do your best in this unhappy business, and I promise you shall be repaid. Of course I depend upon your honourable secrecy, and —— have you anything else to say?"

Yes, Jasper had, and he intimated as much by his manner, when he saw her ladyship about to leave the room.

"I beg your ladyship's pardon for detaining you," said Jasper; "but Mr. David Locke, Sir John's collector of rents in Morden, is dying."

“Poor old Mr. Locke dying, indeed! Well!”

“I am most anxious to have the appointment at his death, and if your ladyship would intercede for me with Sir John, I should be deeply grateful.”

“Mr. Jellifer, I will say what I can for you. You know—all the world in fact knows—what a strange temper Sir John is, but he has his lucid intervals, and I will avail myself of one of them to prefer your suit. Good morning—though, Mr. Jellifer, I must make one condition.”

“Pray name it, your ladyship!” said Jasper, thoroughly satisfied and delighted.

“You must let Mr. Gilbert have a hundred pounds. Tell him, from me, that he must do with that? Good morning”—and her ladyship glided from the room.

She had always been a cold, selfish woman, and married Sir John, her senior by many years, for position, relentlessly breaking whole quires of written vows of constancy and love to one who had believed them. Her married life would have been an unhappy one had she coveted a husband’s

love, or a wife's place in her husband's home ; but, asking neither, finding neither, she had concentrated all the woman's nature she possessed on her only child, ever seeking his advantage at the expense of his brother Gerard, using mean trickery and double dealing to secure her ends, and too frequently employing the agency of her own child, until she had made him as selfish, deceitful, and dishonourable as herself.

The last condition of Lady Norwold was not over acceptable to Jasper, but as he walked down the grand old avenue his former dreams of greatness and profit returned, and he resolved to consult his friend the miller.

Ray, he knew, had been to London, but would return by the mid-day coach, and he might as well call upon him at once, and not wait until the evening for the settlement of some matter of business between them. So Jasper sat down on a bench in the garden to await his friend's return.

We have hitherto said nothing of Jasper's wife, and although she will have little to do with our story for some time to come, she is a person not

to be altogether overlooked. Jasper had smuggled her, almost, into Morden, for none knew of his wooing or of his marriage, and the lady herself was a stranger to every one. She was rather a showy person to be Jasper Jellifer's wife, but she proved to be an industrious woman, and drove as hard a bargain, and loved money as dearly as did her husband. Her maiden name she told to many, had been Harrison, and it was by her introduction, it was said, that Ray and Jasper had become friends. Some persons, indeed, fancied they could trace a family resemblance between Ray and Mrs. Jellifer, but people in country towns will have strange fancies.

Ray returned punctually by the mid-day coach, and he and Jasper were soon closely closeted together. Ray's jovial laugh came now and then pealing through the open window, overpowering poor Jasper's feeble chuckle, which rarely had an independent innings. An hour or so had passed when Gregory, the miller's man, was summoned to the house, and desired to witness the signatures of the two friends to a paper which had been

prepared in London. The man was rather frightened, as persons of his class frequently are, when asked "to put their names to paper;" but Ray for some reason, and despite his *bonhomie*, was not a person any one would willingly disoblige when he required a service of them.

"Now have a glass of wine, Gregory, if only to impress this matter upon your memory," said Ray; "and I hope it may be a long day before you are required to give your evidence."

Both friends laughed in concert, and Gregory grinned and drank off the wine, and never forgot to his dying day the signing of that paper.

"Your mind is at ease now, I hope," said Ray, when Gregory had left the room; "by to-morrow's post the other deed will arrive, and when that is signed, sealed, and delivered, all will be straight between us."

The next day Gregory was again summoned, but no wine was forthcoming, and for that reason among others, he remembered when his head was grey the signing of the second paper also, when Mr. Ray was the miller at Norwold Mill.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. JELLIFER PROVIDES AN OFFERING, AND RAY,
THE MILLER, OFFICIATES AS A PRIEST OF
MAMMON.

THOSE who remember the old coaching days—forgetting, perhaps, many of their discomforts, delays and dangers—are wont to contrast them favourably, with the hurry, noise, and monotony of a journey by rail. It was certainly a pleasant change for the daily worker, whether student, trader, or craftsman, to find himself seated on a well-appointed four-horse coach whirling along through pleasant country scenes, such as England presents, whichever way we travel, silently enjoying the ever changing landscape, now of broad cultivated plains, rich with their promised or accomplished harvests; now of great moorlands, golden with the blossoms of the furze, or purple with the flowers of the heather; the distance

studded with farmer's homesteads or lordly mansions, and changing then to the glorious woodlands, watered by noble rivers or placid streams, until the wearied mind forgot its toils and cares, and felt that the beauteous earth might indeed have been a Paradise. The fresh breeze came like the breath of health, and made the pulse beat quicker, whilst the brisk clatter of the dashing team became a cadence that was almost music. The entrance of the coach into the country town or little village was an event to be regarded. The busiest and the idle, the old and the young, had eyes for nothing else, and every passenger, on the outside at least, felt "a lion" for the moment. What delicious ale you drank at the Change! What luscious ham and delicate fowls you ate at the dinner, and what a princely price you paid for the enjoyment. You pay as nobly now, but *minus* the pleasure. Then the after weed! When did a cigar ever seem so fragrant, so ethereal, as when smoked upon a coach-box, with no better companion at your side than the chatty coachman, whose skill you admired,

and whose universal popularity you almost envied. Mr. Babbage, that sorely tormented gentleman (may his tormentors eat dirt!—by the bye, they do that), would have forgiven the strong-lunged guard for the melody produced by his straight horn or key bugle, and paid his tip at the end of the journey with the readiness of gratitude. Soho! our ride by coach is ended, and what is written may seem rhapsodies, but many shared them on the day when Gilbert Norwold obtained his “*exeat*,” and left Cambridge for Morden.

The ride was a dreary one for him, and when he arrived in London he almost determined to retrace his road, and dare Gerard to his worst rather than proceed on his humiliating mission. He thought, however, that Gerard would not be diverted from the resolution he had expressed to see restitution made; and he knew that his father would feel the family honour compromised, and against that conviction his parental affection would weigh as a grain of sand. So, he must on to Morden, and purchase his redemption from

Jasper Jellifer at whatever price he might be pleased to require for the service to be rendered.

The coach would arrive about nine o'clock, and to avoid recognition, Gilbert had requested Jasper to meet him with his covered cart about a mile from the Elms, and his request had been obeyed.

As Gilbert had made frequently secret runs home, the guard and coachman (to whom he was well known), were not surprised at this arrangement, and both knew their business too well to allude to the circumstance when they made the next change at Morden.

"Well, Jellifer," said Gilbert, as soon as they were seated in the cart, "are you ready with the money?"

The inquiry was somewhat abrupt, but Jasper was undisturbed by it, and the more especially as he was not about to ask any favour from Gilbert.

"The sum you require is far above my means," he replied—"very far, and you ought to have known that, sir."

"I don't believe you, Jasper; that's flat!" said Gilbert. "I am sure you must have the money;

but I suppose now that you know the infernal strait I am in, you want to play the Shylock. You need not hesitate to ask your price—I am prepared to pay liberally; that is, to promise to pay, and my brother Gerard will do the same."

"I tell you once again, sir, that I have not the power to help you to so much as 200*l.* I saw her ladyship this morning."

"Ah! What did she say?"

"She was very much cut up, sir, when I told her what you had written about. Very much cut up :" said Jasper, with emotion.

"She always cries before she puts her hand in her pocket, I know," replied Gilbert. "But she gave you her security?"

"Not so; she has given me no security, because I told her as I tell you, I have not the money."

"Then you must borrow it," cried Gilbert, much excited by Jasper's coolness and protestations. "My honour, my future welfare, is concerned, and you must find me the money, you cold-blooded fellow."

“I am not what you call me, Mr. Gilbert, and I will prove it to you at once. I offered to give you all the money I have—some 50*l.* or so, and your lady mother said that you must make that sufficient, as—”

“How can she know what is sufficient?” cried Gilbert. “She ought to be able to manage better, and make Sir John more liberal with his money. I tell you once for all 50*l.* is of no use to me.”

“‘You *may* make it a hundred,’ said her ladyship, ‘and I will see you paid;’ and being anxious to serve you, sir, and her ladyship, I have been to my friend Mr. Ray—the miller, sir—and he hopes to be able to make up another fifty pounds to mine. We will go down this lane, and then cross the river in a boat. My cart would be known in the market place, and people would wonder what business I had at the mill so late at night.”

Gilbert sat silent for some minutes, and then said :

“A hundred pounds, eh? Hm!—Gerard will

get fifty from Sir John, and that might be made sufficient."

"You must not calculate upon that, sir," said Jasper. "As I was sitting in the Hall this morning, I could not help hearing Sir John desire her ladyship to write to you both, and refuse your brother the money."

Gilbert swore a strong oath for so young a man, but he had been accustomed to hear such phrases from his father's mouth.

"Please, don't swear in such a fearful way, sir," said Jasper. "I am not a religious man, but we are about to cross the river in a boat, and I don't like the water even by day-light."

By this time they had reached an old boathouse on the banks of the river, and Jasper had made all needful preparations, as a boy was waiting to ferry them across to Norwold Park, after the horse had been put up at a neighbouring stable.

The night was star-light, and the fine old Hall looked grand amid its surrounding of stately trees as Gilbert and Jasper walked under the

shadow of the park palings to Norwold Mill. They found Ray waiting for them at the garden gate, and the miller raising his hat to Gilbert, led the way to the house in silence.

The room they entered was the one in which Jack Spraggatt had found the ring, but now the shutters were closed, and thick red curtains drawn before them. Supper was laid upon the table, and as the evening had been somewhat chilly, a bright wood fire was burning, and both were heartily welcomed by the two wayfarers. The miller's pleasant manner and cheerful face was not lost upon Gilbert, and he soon went heartily to work at the excellent supper provided for the party. No word was spoken on the matter which had called them together until the table being cleared and the materials for grog brought in, the domestic was dismissed for the night.

Ray broke ground.

“Mr. Jellifer has told me, sir, of your wants, and of his own inability to meet them, and has come to me, who am quite as poor as himself, to help in the matter.”

Gilbert bowed slightly, and said, "Just so. I understand that Mr. Jellifer has explained my present position to you, and that you have kindly undertaken to help me, if you can."

"That 'if,'" said the miller, "is the difficulty."

The clock in the passage struck eleven.

Jasper rose hastily, and said that as his wife, who knew nothing of this business, would be alarmed at his absence, and possibly be making inquiries for him, he begged to be allowed to go.

Ray knew all the particulars, and Mr. Gilbert had arranged to remain at the mill until the early morning, when Jasper was to call for him with the covered cart. As there was no reason why he should remain, Ray saw him to the garden gate, and after a few minutes returned to his guest.

"To tell the truth," said he. "I am glad Jellifer has left us. He is a good fellow enough, but he has seen nothing of the world, and has all the narrow prejudices of a provincial shop-keeper. Your grog is not to your liking, I'm afraid, sir?"

Gilbert assured him that it was capital, and the miller went on, having first produced some cigars of excellent quality.

“I do not wish to force myself upon your confidence, or to take advantage of what I already know, but being a burnt child myself, I am very anxious to help you if I can.” He paused for a few moments, and then continued. “If I had had an adviser when young, I should not be a huckstering miller, nor the intimate of such a man as Jasper Jellifer; but I made one mistake, and was unforgiven—turned out into the world to fight the battle of life—to sink or swim, as best I could. I know what I have suffered, and seen what others have suffered also.”

There was silence, and both sat looking at the bright fire.

“I have no right to say more,” continued the miller—“no right to ask you to tell me anything; but the sum you—a young man—require is so large, and the need of it so urgent, that—” he paused.

“That, what?” asked Gilbert.

“That I would make a great effort to help you, if I believed it would save you from the evil consequences of a boyish folly.”

Gilbert was touched by Ray’s tone, and kindly manner almost more than by his words, and he said, “Thank you, thank you, Mr. Ray. The money would indeed save me from a very painful difficulty.”

“Yet you will not trust me, because I am not your equal. Is it not so?”

“That is not my reason,” replied Gilbert; “on my honour, no! and I will hesitate no longer. I only desire that what I say, be not communicated to Jellifer, or indeed to any other person.”

Ray gave the required assurance, and Gilbert continued:

“I have a brother as you know, a half brother only, and older than myself. He is up at Cambridge with me. Our pursuits, our habits, are widely different; and whilst he, I believe, is considered a thoroughly good fellow, I am regarded by his set as a rather loose fish. I accept the distinction, because I know I deserve it.

Gerard rarely touches a card, and I am fond of play, and latterly I have —, I have —”

“Lost your money,” remarked Ray, as Gilbert made a pause.

“No; I have won somewhat largely, and principally of a freshman.”

“Well, no harm in that,” said Ray, as Gilbert again ceased speaking.

“You are mistaken; all the harm I fear is from that cause. ‘Easy got, easy go,’ is an old adage, and so it has been with my winnings. Pressing debts, and some fresh extravagancies, have disposed of all my gains. That had been all very well; but this is my difficulty: my good and worthy brother has come to know of the matter—how does not signify—and because my opponent chances to be a rich young fool, Gerard desires me to restore the fellow his losings, and that forthwith; pretending that our family honour, or some such nonsense, is concerned.”

“And what, if you refuse to comply with such an unreasonable request?” asked Ray, with a smile.

“The blackguard threatens to tell my father, knowing his ungovernable temper, and that he would turn me out of doors as likely as not; for I have never been a favourite with him, and he has forbidden us, again and again I own, to play for money.”

“Would your brother do this, think you?”

“Yes—remorselessly. He has said he would, even when I pleaded for my mother. He is sneak enough to keep his word,” answered Gilbert.

“Your position is indeed desperate!” said Ray, with a sigh; “for I know of what evil things your *good* young man is capable. It was a ‘good young man’ that made my father close his door on me, and changed the whole purpose of my life. You want £200?”

“Yes. Jellifer will advance £50, and Gerard wrote home for fifty more, and has been refused.”

“That I know, as Jasper saw your mother this morning, after a stormy breakfast with Sir John,” said Ray. “I wish I were rich enough to help you; from my soul I do; but I have a hard fight

to keep my place, poor as it is. However, I have not asked this confidence without a reason. Had you needed this money for any ordinary purpose, I should have added a little to Jasper's loan, and so have ended. But your case is too desperate to hesitate, from false delicacy, perhaps, to tell you what can be done. Your brother has everything to gain by your exposure ; but from some sense of decency he has made this home request for money, knowing it would be refused, and proposed to give his security to Jasper, knowing it to be worthless, has he not? I guessed at something of this, and therefore have not been idle in your behalf, although only partially successful. Fill your glass again, Mr. Gilbert, and then I will tell you all that can be done."

Ray made up the fire, and threw on another log or two, muttering audibly as he did so, " Poor young fellow!" He then seated himself, and said :

" I have been to London on this matter, Mr. Gilbert, unknown to Jellifer. I have brought back the money, and here it is in this pocket-

book. It is at your service conditionally, and pray bear in mind that the terms I am about to propose are not mine, but of the man from whom the money comes. Were it mine, there should be none. I have obtained one hundred and fifty pounds from a money-lender — one of the most cautious of his class. He has known me long, too long for my advantage, but as I never deceived him, he will at all times take my word, and not my security. He knows my real circumstances too well. Yet, as I say, he will trust to my word and to my honour. He will lend you this money on one condition only. Mind it is he who speaks. He will have some tangible security, such, as he says, Lady Norwold can easily give if she be so minded. She must have jewels, diamonds, and those he will have, or I am bound to return him this money.”

Gilbert started from his seat, exclaiming, “ Impossible! She will not risk my father’s anger.”

“ She will,” said Ray, calmly; “ she will, when she knows it will save her son from the ruin which is before him. Sit down, sir, and let us talk

quietly. Reflect—has Lady Norwold no jewels which she seldom wears. Your family will not go to town until Christmas, and before that time your mother can easily obtain—for women have great tact—the money from your father to redeem any pledge she may now give. Reflect—has she nothing that you can ask her to lend you at this terrible emergency ? ”

“ Yes—she has one ornament which she rarely wears—a diamond bracelet given her by Sir John, I have heard her say, shortly after they were married,” replied Gilbert.

“ Ask her to lend you that,” said Ray, coolly.

“ But how to see her, even if I wait until to-morrow ? I dare not go to the Hall, and she is not always at liberty to leave home.”

“ Go to her to-night,” said Ray. She and Sir John occupy separate chambers—do they not ?—whenever there has been a domestic breeze, and one blew pretty stiffly this morning, I hear. It has been whispered, Mr. Gilbert, that you could find your way into Norwold Hall without troubling the porter.” And the miller smiled.

“I thought that secret was known only to myself,” answered Gilbert, smiling also, and colouring deeply. “There is an entrance, but then one door will be locked to-night, and I have not the key.”

“Where there’s a will there’s a way,” said the miller, laughing, and going to one corner of the room where a portrait hung. “Secret for secret, Mr. Gilbert. Here is my Hassarac’s cavern. Open Sesame!” As he spoke he pressed upon the moulding of the picture frame, the canvas flew up, and disclosed a very shallow recess behind it. “A present this, from my old friend the money-lender, and I use it for odds and ends that else would get astray. Here are some keys of various sizes. One of them perhaps, may remove your difficulty.”

Gilbert looked at the bunch; there were some dozen or so, and at last selected three which appeared to be available. The ring to which they were attached was rusted, however, and would not open.

“Take them as they are,” said the miller, and remember what you have at stake. Home and

fortune, or a life of struggle, not ending perhaps —in a mill."

The moon shone very brightly, and the stars glistened like the eyes of angels, when Gilbert Norwold entered the grand old avenue to steal into his father's house like a thief in the night. Again and again his heart failed him, but all that Ray had spoken came back to him, hissing in his ears, and roused him to proceed.

The door through which he had often passed secretly at night, was in the wall of a small yard, which had been formerly used for poultry by the first Lady Norwold; but had been long neglected. From the roof of a small building within it, Gilbert could reach a staircase window which was without a fastening, and through this he had passed often and often. The lock of the door was of the commonest construction, and one of the keys he had readily opened it.

He soon reached the roof of the neglected aviary, and walked along it towards the window which had frequently given him access to the house when he had been absent without the

knowledge of, or against the wish of his father. As he drew nearer to the house, his shadow rose up before him on the wall, as though to warn him of impending danger, or to drive him back from the commission of a crime. It startled him for a moment, but again the miller's words—"Home and fortune—a life of struggle,"—came back to him, and he opened the window.

When Gilbert Norwold stood in his father's house his heart beat violently, and he felt how mean an act he was committing. How many a wretched hour had he spared himself and others, had he listened to the still small voice within that called to him to go back.

Noiselessly, as one stealing to do murder, did he approach his mother's dressing-room. The thick curtains shut out the moonlight, and he was afraid to proceed until he had carefully withdrawn the hangings and let it in. Silently he reached the door of the bed-chamber, and found it locked. He tapped once, only once, upon the panel, and no one spoke, and he feared to knock again, thinking his mother could not be in that room.

What was to become of him ? If all that Ray had suggested should come to pass ! If Gerard should be the false-hearted treacherous brother that he had made him appear to be ! If he could have seen his mother alone but for a few minutes, he knew her love for him was so strong, herself so weak, that she would have yielded to his prayers for assistance. What now was to be done ?

The moonlight streaming through the half-opened curtains fell full upon the small cabinet wherein his mother kept her trinkets. The thought which passed through his mind when he saw this, almost deprived him of the power to move. There was deliverance behind those painted doors. Again the words of Ray came back to him—Homeless ! Portionless ! and all by the word of a false brother. His hand almost instinctively sought the keys in his pocket ; he drew them forth—one, two, three, were tried without effect. Again he paused in his guilty work, and again Ray's words were in his ears. His mother would save him did she know all. He would tell her all to-morrow or the next day, when he would

write to her. A key was found at last, one painted door was opened, and there, on the little shelf where he had seen it lie so often, was the bracelet case. He opened it, took out the bracelet, and returned the case. His brain was numbed now, and his heart almost still, but the click of the closing lock set both at work again. How he reached the park he could not remember, but he must have returned the way he had entered, as he found the keys in his hand. Uttering a sharp cry, he hurled them away, and running down the avenue, would have fallen to the ground, had not Ray suddenly advanced to him from the shadow of some trees which stood near the pathway leading from the park to the mill.

It was some minutes before Gilbert could proceed, even with the assistance of Ray, who kept silent, fearing to provoke a return of his young friend's faintness, by any inopportune question.

When they had entered the miller's parlour, where the fire still burned brightly, Gilbert burst into tears and laid his head upon the table; and

Ray did not speak for some time, not until the sobbing ceased.

“Has the interview been so painful?” he asked.

“Oh, most painful! most painful! never to be forgotten from this hour by me. Say no more, sir. It is over! There is the bracelet.” He almost threw it upon the table, and Ray, who did not care to increase Gilbert’s distress, took it up and examined it carefully. It was of diamond work surrounding a portrait of Sir John Norwold. Ray held it in his hand for some time, and a smile of satisfaction passed over his pleasant features.

Gilbert sat with his face covered by his hands, and so Ray proceeded to count out £200, and to write some memoranda on a sheet of paper.

“Now, sir,” he said at length, “Jasper’s cart will be here directly, and we may as well conclude our painful business. There are notes for £200, and I must trouble you to give me your brother’s undertaking for Jellifer, and to sign these memoranda for the other money. They are receipts for these two sums, and here is another signed by me

acknowledging the possession of this bracelet, and the amount, £200, for which it is pledged. Mr. Jellifer will arrange his own charge for interest."

Gilbert did not observe the cold vicious tone in which Ray now addressed him, but signed the papers, and gave Ray Gerard's letter acknowledging his responsibility. He had scarcely finished when Jasper's covered cart drove up to the mill, and Gilbert shaking the miller warmly by the hand, joined the clever agent, who had helped him to such a generous friend as Miller Ray.

When the miller returned to the house, he saw that Gilbert had left the paper acknowledging Ray's possession of the bracelet behind him. Ray shook his head, and placing the paper in his cash-box, opened his Hassarac's cavern and deposited them within it. The bracelet, and the receipt signed by Gilbert, he put into his pocket, no doubt intending to give them to the money-lender, who had such remarkable reliance on his word and honour.

On the evening of the next day, Gilbert Norwold entered his brother's rooms at Cambridge

his whole appearance so changed, that to any one slightly acquainted with him, he would have been hardly recognisable. His face so haggard that the deepened lines added years to its expression, whilst his curved shoulders seemed bent down by the weight of the heavy heart within. He did not offer to sit down, and hardly accepted the hand his brother Gerard extended to him. Gerard was surprised and pained at the change, and more so when Gilbert said in a low hollow voice :—

“I have brought back the money. Jellifer lent me £50 on your security. For the rest I am indebted to my mother. I leave to you the restitution.”

“My dear Gilbert, you are ill,” said his brother. “Is it fatigue, or have you had words at home?”

“I am fatigued,” replied Gilbert. “I have not closed my eyes since I left Cambridge. Our father’s honour—your honour—is preserved.”

“And yours also, dear brother,” said Gerard, taking Gilbert’s hand. As he did so he felt that a shudder passed through his brother’s frame, and

saw that on his forehead large drops of sweat came suddenly and fast.

“Lie down on my bed. You are ill; I am sure you are,” said Gerard. “Let me send for the doctor.”

Gilbert instantly appeared to rouse himself, and replied: “No necessity for that, Gerard. My interview with—with Jellifer and his friend, who advanced the money, was long and humiliating. It lasted throughout the night, and I have travelled here since I saw them—I will go to my own rooms. You will see Mariott. I suppose I need not ask you to spare me as much as possible. You will do that, however, for your own sake. There are two hundred pounds in notes.”

“I suppose,” said Gerard, unwilling to reply to his brother’s taunt—“I suppose the terms exacted by the lenders are somewhat hard.”

“Yes,” answered Gilbert: a shuddering shook him this time unnoticed by his brother. “You may know some day what it is to be in desperate need and wanting a helping friend. When that time comes, Gerard, remember how sharp

the ordeal has been to which you condemned me."

"I condemned you?"

"Yes, you—my brother. Your wicked threats of exposure here and at home, have well nigh driven me mad; and now that I have done what you required of me, let me alone. Do not come near me so long as we are 'up' here. When we go home I will try to behave to you as I have always done. I will spare no effort to do so, but until the vacation I desire to be let alone." And then, without another parting word, Gilbert left the room, whilst Gerard, surprised and silent, had not power to question him as to the meaning of his words.

"The poor fellow's ill—excited," he thought. "Perhaps annoyed at the wretched discovery I have made, and afraid that Mariott should guess the truth. That he shall never know from me. Gerard went to bed, and laid an hour or more awake devising the construction of the note to be sent to Mariott in the morning.

On the next day, Julius Mariott, of —— Col-

lege, Cambridge, when seated at breakfast, was greatly surprised by the following note:—

“ DEAR MARIOTT,—You are such a good fellow, that I am sure you will feel no offence at what I write, and will heartily coincide in the course which my brother and myself have considered it our duty to adopt with reference to Gilbert’s winnings at various times of you and others.

“ My father is a man of very violent temper and prejudices, and did he know that either of us had disobeyed any particular injunction of his, I am afraid—nay, I am sure—that the consequences would be most serious to our future welfare. One of the promises which he exacted from us both on coming up here was, that we should never play at cards for money. I am ashamed to say that we have forgotten that promise. A strong sense of the impropriety of this conduct, and of the danger attending it, has made us resolved to throw ourselves upon your generosity, and ask you to enable us, as far as it can be done, to undo the past by not hesitating to receive the enclosure.

“Mariott, you will not refuse us—you must not. We know how repugnant such acceptance of lost money must be to you; but like a noble, good fellow, waive your right to be angry and offended, and place us in a position to tell our father, should he question us, that we have not altogether disobeyed his injunction or broken our promise. This is, I grant you, a mean equivocation at the best, but it is the nearest approach to truth and right which we can make. You will not refuse us, will you?—I am faithfully,

“GERARD NORWOLD.”

“What the devil am I to do?” thought Mariott, when he had finished reading. “This isn’t fair to a man. Nobody ought to ask you to do such a thing under any circumstances.” He glanced at the letter again, and did not feel quite so certain of his conclusions. “They have put it in such a way that it seems beastly to refuse them. And yet I really can’t accept—I can’t. I should cut with myself if I did—if that were possible.” Another hurried perusal of the letter left the

young gentleman more undecided. "Well, it's not fair, that's all I can say, to ask a man such a thing, and in his first term too. Suppose I send it to some charity. Well, perhaps that gets over the difficulty," and Mr. Mariott walked out into the High Street so obfuscated that he nearly came to grief by passing no less than three Dons without capping them.

How a single act of good or evil oftentimes changes the colour of all our future lives?

Gilbert Norwold, so late the thoughtless, pleasure-seeking youth, was now a moody miserable creature, made so by one guilty deed, which he must hide for years to come within the secret chamber of his own bosom. No, not from every one. His mother must know the dreadful thing he had done, and he would write to her at once. He began to narrate the disgraceful story; but the words he wrote blinded him, and he tore up the paper. To-morrow the confession should be made. Another terrible night passed over, and the theft he had committed appeared more mean, more criminal, and he could not write

down the record of his own degradation. He would wait until he returned home, and then he would tell her of his evil doing. The vacation was close at hand, and then he would confess to her his sin, and be forgiven.

Two days only of the term remained, and his resolution had not strengthened; so, when Mariott pressed him to spend a week with him before he returned to Norwold Hall, the unhappy criminal felt it as a reprieve, and thankfully accepted the invitation.

The ailing man who suffers day by day from some torturing malady, will often hesitate to seek the aid of the physician, because he fears to learn the worst or bear the pain of cure, until those dreadful words, "Too late," are his sentence to the grave. Gilbert Norwold was like the ailing man, and his moral sore grew and grew, until it killed his peace.

CHAPTER V.

SACRILEGE AND MATRIMONY AT MORDEN.

THE long vacation had commenced, and Gerard had come home to Norwold Hall. He had undergone more than one wigging from Sir John on his presumed extravagance, and borne them patiently, convinced that his College bills would bear scrutiny, and that he should deserve, if he did not obtain, the parental blessing. Lady Norwold, though dying, as she said, to embrace her boy, was, nevertheless, glad at his temporary absence, as Gerard had to sustain the first outburst of his father's ill-humours, and Sir John was soon forgetful of most of his resentments.

Shortly after Gerard's return from Cambridge, Sir John was much occupied with his magisterial duties, as Morden church had been entered and robbed of its valuable communion plate,

almost under the nose of the beadle. On all similar occasions, it was Sir John's practice to issue warrants against every person suspected of poaching ; and although the accused were generally acquitted, the justice of the peace was gratified in thinking that he had caused annoyance to some of the vagabonds who preferred night-walking after his game with the occasional chance of goal allowance to hard labour for eighteen-pence a-day, and the certainty of the short commons such earnings could procure.

The scandal of this sacrilege made the local authorities more than usually fussy ; for, strange to say, in no instance of burglary had the county constabulary been successful in discovering a trace of the perpetrators, or of the lost property. The only man in Morden who seemed to have any particular suggestions to make on the matter was Miller Ray, and he earnestly advised that communication should be established with the London police, as there was no doubt but the thieves came from the metropolis, and would undoubtedly dispose of their evil gains in

the same locality. The suggestion was accepted by the whole Bench as a very good one (although Sir John insisted upon having a few poachers bagged for his own satisfaction); and the clerk of the court considered the facility with which Mr. Ray drew up the particulars of the robbery as something remarkable in a miller.

Mr. Ray laughed, and assured the functionary that it must be a natural gift, as he had never cultivated it, and its development was only attributable to the honest indignation he felt, in common with the other inhabitants of Morden, at the loss which the church had sustained, not to mention his detestation of the perpetrators of such an act.

Sir John being thus occupied, Gerard was left to his own resources for amusement, and it was therefore no wonder that he was daily with Jack Spraggatt, who was an especial favourite with every one at the Hall.

The Elms were more than usually attractive at this time, as great preparations were in progress for the marriage of Letty, Jack's elder sister, and

Gerard displayed such taste in assisting Lucy to decorate the barn wherein the wedding breakfast was to take place, that he might have been born the son of an upholsterer, rather than the heir to an ancient baronetcy. A looker-on might have thought that he occupied more time than was really necessary in peering into Lucy's pretty face, asking her questions as to the effect of his arrangements, or requesting assistance in carrying them out, than became such an adept. Lucy's face was very pretty, certainly, and when she smiled, and her bright blue eyes sparkled also, it was not an easy matter to look away from it. Her rich auburn curls were fitting adornments for such features, and almost wooed the fingers to play with the silken tresses. Her voice, too, was a pleasant sound to hear, making the commonest words seem like notes of music.

Her figure would have been injured by any less simple dress than that which she generally wore, and flounces, and braids, and fringes would have been as much out of keeping as they would be upon Canova's masterpiece. Yet she appeared

unconscious of her beauty, although, no doubt, she and her looking-glass were no strangers to each other. She was well educated as middle-class girls were taught then, and could sing and play such simple songs and melodies as make the music festivals of home. She had paid long visits to London, and could talk of other things beside farm-stock and poultry, and had not lost her love for the duties of her country life, as the dairy and store-room could testify. She was the light of Jack Spraggatt's home, and he rejoiced in his heart of hearts that it was Letty who was about to leave them, and not Lucy.

The wedding day was close at hand, and a great day it was to be! Jack Spraggatt was not so lively as he ought to have been, Gerard said, but Lucy thought she could divine the reason. The bridegroom elect was a Frenchman, whom Letty had met in London. He was a young man of a good Protestant family, but the Spraggatts had their national prejudices, and would rather have had their new connection one of the family of John Bull. The fates had willed it

otherwise, for Letty, who was a pretty, weak-minded girl, and consequently very obstinate, had, despite many domestic engagements with the family, compelled them at last to lay down their arms and surrender at her discretion. It was Jack's dislike to the Frenchman (or something else, perhaps), that made him very moody at times, and a little cross when new expenses were proposed, or the list of invitations was extended.

It is surprising what interest all women take in weddings. Marriage is certainly a great event in a young girl's life, and should be productive of happy anticipations, even when her nurture has been gentle and her home a loving one. Still, there is change before her, a future which may differ widely from the past, a newer love to be trusted than the one that has watched over her from the hour of her birth, and been prodigal of all which has constituted the happiness of her life. Alas ! no past, however free from cares, can ensure a future equally happy, and the old must die and leave the young to trust in one another.

It is wonderful, we repeat, the interest women take in weddings, even in those where they themselves are not the principals. Mothers, sisters, aunts, cousins, friends and servants, when a wedding is in prospect, display a consequence and an excitement entirely unusual with them. The family conversation (and we doubt not that of the collateral relations we have enumerated) lapses occasionally into other subjects, but the grand staple is of the bride and bridemaids, wreaths, dresses, presents, and wedding-cake. Money, labour, time, are all accounted subservient to the one grand object, as though a great sacrificial ceremony was about to take place, and every one was bound to be prepared with an offering.

The Elms was no exception to other households, and the number of volunteer needlewomen was immense. Willing pens were busy day and evening inditing invitations to friends distant and near, until poor Jack thought that the Big Barn would be fuller than it was before Miller Ray emptied it. He ventured once or twice to hint

at a limitation of numbers, but such excellent and unanswerable reasons were given why the list should be increased rather than curtailed, that he always retired discomfited.

Gerard invariably sided with the ladies, unless, indeed, Lucy voted with Jack, and then he thought no more of giving a plumper in opposition to the opinion he had previously expressed than would a free and independent voter who had listened to the eloquence of the late Mr. David Locke during a contested election.

The wedding-day arrived at last, and the Big Barn looked like a sylvan bower, so well had Gerard and Lucy devised, and willing labourers had worked. The tables were covered with home-made delicacies, whilst the plate-baskets of relatives and dear friends had been laid under contribution, and their contents glittered as brightly as the glasses. Lucy ran to take a peep just before going to church, although arrayed in her bridemaid's dress of simple white, dotted over with lilies gathered from her own garden, and was surprised to find

Gerard there, giving the rustic servants the benefit of his more refined experience. With gentlemanly delicacy he had not called at the house, as Jack had not presumed to ask him to the church, although he had invited him to the breakfast, and therefore Gerard came to Lucy and apologised for the liberty he was taking, in directing the arrangements of the wedding-feast.

Oh, that blushing cheek ; that radiant smile which thanked him as much as the sweet voice for such kindly consideration, and Gerard saw and heard them long after Lucy had gone to the distant church, long after, when he had seen no other face he knew for many weary months, and when he sighed to think he should never meet Lucy more.

None must believe them to be lovers.

Had Gerard Norwold suspected that he had in his heart a spark of love for Lucy, he would have crushed it out by his will remorselessly. He was the heir to an old ancestry, and would have died any death rather than have disgraced it by a marriage with any one beneath him in station.

He knew her only as dear old Jack Spraggatt's pretty, graceful, happy, honest-hearted sister, and so he esteemed her. Had Lucy believed that the pleasure she derived from her association with Gerard Norwold was other than the gratification of a respectful friendship, she would have despised herself, for she never forgot the difference of station which existed between them. No! none must believe them to be lovers.

The bridal feast was a merry one, and

“Laughter holding both his sides,”

seemed to have taken the chair for the occasion.

The oratory was rather discursive, and the metaphors somewhat mixed, but the hearts of the speakers were in their words; and when that is the case, any one, to our thinking, is a Demosthenes.

Thresher's flails had made noisy clattering on the floor of the Big Barn times and often, and the drowsy bats, nestling in the roof, had slept on in peace, but the hearty response to the health of the bride and bridegroom, roused them from their slumber, and scared them into the daylight.

Jack Spraggatt's face beamed with the sunshine in his heart, which did not leave it when his French brother-in-law, M. Fichard, broke down in his English, and finished his "return thanks" in his own language, as though he had been the personification of a French and English vocabulary.

The bridal feast had lasted long enough—to judge by the hubbub which succeeded, and the general desire on the part of the gentlemen to shake hands with each other; whilst their happy, healthy faces, showed in the richer brown which stained them, that the good wine had reached their hearts as well as their heads; therefore, a final glass was drank, and a parting cheer was given so heartily that it overpowered the church bells which had been ding-donging for the last quarter of an hour as a summons to the lingering bride and bridegroom.

The lawn at the Elms might have challenged the county for a display of beauty and rustic elegance. Matrimony is considered by the highest authorities to be epidemical; and such whisper-

ings and smilings, such daring attempts at pressing of fingers, and, in one or two instances, of waist encirclings, that any one might have surmised that more than a dozen couples, strolling about Jack's garden, had taken the infection that happy morning.

When the time arrived for the departure of the happy pair, the poor pale face of the bride was made rosy with kisses, as she passed up the garden walk to the gate, and some agitated young gentlemen became sufficiently confused and excited to salute the bridemaids, whose screaming was delightful to hear. Be merry, happy youth! Lose no innocent pleasure, nor indulge in a sinful one! Gather every flower that your hand can reach. Listen to every pleasant song that charms your ear. Dance! Dance! whilst your heart is light, and be thankful for your beauty, before wrinkles steal into your face, or a silver thread shines in your soft hair! God gave you youth for enjoyment, that the remembrance of its delights may come back to you in age, and solace you with its happy

memories—but happy only when pure and innocent.

The bride and bridegroom departed with all the time-honoured ceremonies, the old slipper reposing in the bosom of M. Fichard's full-frilled shirt. There were willing hands enough to clear the tables, and prepare the barn for dancing, and nimble feet to keep the town band constantly employed in playing country dances, reels and jigs, for as yet the solemn quadrille had not been introduced generally to the Morden Terpsichoreans. Those were the dancing days of Old England, putting to shame our shambling, hopping, slithering times, and hands across, down the middle, up again, and pousset had been performed twenty times at least before Sir Roger de Coverley wound up the ball by exhausting the most persistent dancer after a bout of three-quarters of an hour, and so a happy morning ended with a happy night. At least all said as much the next day, excepting Gerard, who having missed Jack from the ball-room for some time, went in search of him.

Jack was not in the house, and one of the servants said she had seen him walking in the garden. Gerard sought his friend in the direction indicated, and found him at last standing in the shadow of a yew hedge, his face covered by his hands and his broad bosom heaving painfully.

“My dear old fellow !” said Gerard. “What is the matter with you ?”

Jack recovered himself instantly, and answered: “Nothing, Gerard ; nothing, really. The heat of the barn—the excitement of the day rather over-powered me.”

“Forgive me, Jack,” said Gerard, “but you are not telling me the truth. Surely you do not regret this marriage ? I know it was not a matter you would have desired, but——.”

“I am glad, very glad, that Letty has found so good a husband. Do not ask me to tell you—at least, not now—what has disturbed and unmanned me. It is something to be thankful for to know that you, my kind warmhearted friend, can never be unhappy from the same cause, unless you

create it by your own free will, and that I believe to be impossible. No more now. Let us go to my friends, and —. No, I will not ask you to be silent as to what you have seen, for you are a gentleman.”

Jack returned with Gerard to the dancers in the barn, and for the next hour was the merriest of them all. It was not very long after that he and Gerard made strange revelations to each other.

As there was a bright moon that night—bright as the coming honeymoon, which was to shine on a whole month of wedded happiness—Gerard had arranged to walk home, having engaged a bed at the inn in the market place, as Sir John objected, when he was not the cause, to the servants at the Hall sitting up. He had entered the High Street, and was walking leisurely on, when a man passed him, bidding him “good night.” Gerard returned the salutation, and at the sound of his voice the man turned, and accosted him by name.

“Yes, I am Mr. Gerard Norwold,” he replied.

“You are a friend, I believe, of Mr. John Spraggatt, sir,” said the man.

“I am. What then?”

“You have just left his house, I conclude?”

“Yes. What then?”

“Do you know, sir, whether any of his men servants sleep in the house to-night?” asked the stranger.

“That is a question I decline to answer,” replied Gerard. “As you are unknown to me, I beg you to leave me.”

“You would not, if you knew the motive I have in making the inquiry,” said the man.

“Perhaps so; but as I do not, I will thank you to keep the way you were going, and allow me to follow mine alone.”

“Very well, sir,” said the man. “It is of no great consequence, perhaps. Good night, sir,” and to Gerard’s surprise, he saw his unknown questioner take the way to the river. In a few moments he heard the splash of oars, and soon after a boat struck against the opposite bank.

“Quite an adventure,” he thought to himself.

“If he has any intention of paying Jack an unseasonable visit, I should not advise him to select to-night for doing so.” Thus musing, Gerard reached his inn without further interruption.

Jack went to bed soon after midnight, having secured safely in the great oak chest the borrowed plate, which had added so much to the splendour of the breakfast; but sleep came not. No, the skeleton in the cupboard was waiting in his bed-chamber to recall to him the past, and to remind him of the present and the future. As he lay thus occupied he heard the same creaking noise as had attracted his attention when the window hasp had been filed, and the old chest ransacked. He rose at once, and opening his window noiselessly, looked out, and saw two men at work beneath him. Before he could think upon his course of action, a low whistle from the road startled the burglars, and with the swiftness of guilty men they fled up the garden, and joined the confederate who had given the signal. That man’s figure appeared to be familiar to him. Who was that man?

Jack crept softly down-stairs, and was rejoiced to find the great oak box safe as he had left it. He laid himself upon it and fell asleep.

CHAPTER VI.

LUCY MAKES A CONFIDANT OF GERARD, AND HE BRINGS JACK TO CONFESSION.

THREE days after the wedding and its glories had passed away, Gerard came to the Elms for a day's fishing with his friend Jack. He found Lucy alone in the breakfast parlour as Mrs. Spraggatt was indisposed, and Jack was busy arranging the tackle in his own room.

Gerard was completely at home at the Elms, therefore he had entered without ceremony, and was surprised to find Lucy so occupied with her thoughts, that she was not conscious of his presence for some moments. Her thoughts were sad ones, as Gerard read them, and it was not until he had wished her good morning, that her habitual smile returned, and bade him welcome. As it was the first time that Gerard had ever seen a shade of sadness upon those sunny features,

he had during the few moments it had remained there thought of Jack in the yew walk, and connected the two meetings with each other.

The shadow had gone, however, like the one passing cloud on a summer sky, and all was sunshine again in that sweet face, and placing her hand in Gerard's with the freedom of her honest friendship, she wished her guest good morning in such a cheery voice, that he almost mistrusted the evidence of his eyes.

Jack answered to her summons with a cheery voice also, and instantly joined his friend at the breakfast table. A capital breakfast it was, and the two young men with a long days' sport before them did complete justice to it. Jack managed to monopolise the talk, and seemed so elated at his prospective holiday, that any one might have supposed he had never had a day's fishing since his school days.

“We will try Drayton water first, Gerard,” he said; “there used to be the best trout in the county from the mill up to the stone bridge, unless the rascally poachers have taken

them. If that fails us, we will drive over to Basston, and have a try for a jack or two. I have sent on to the Drayton Arms, and ordered some live bait to be ready. And Lucy has packed up a hamper for dinner, so that we may make a long day of it, as the evening often makes amends for the bad sport of the morning. Our luncheons we can take in our pockets. Dinner we will have at the Drayton Arms, and old Mrs. Morgan will think herself well paid by half-a-crown, and what the men will have to drink. You've brought a couple of rods, I see. You need not have burthened yourself with a landing net, as I have a couple. Another cup of tea, Lucy, and tell Joe, when he comes home to dinner, to take the black horse to be shod. He ought to have seen that his fore shoes are worn as thin as a sixpence. I've not had a day's fishing, Mr. Gerard, since we went out together last autumn. Don't hurry your breakfast, I have a short note to write, and the chaise-cart will be at the door by the time I have done—say half an hour from this; and Lucy you will see to the rest,

dear, I know ; I shall not be more than half-an-hour—no, not more than twenty minutes,” and Jack left the room.

There was nothing in this common-place talk to call up again the sad look in Lucy’s face, yet it was there, and Gerard saw it with some anxiety.

“ Jack seems in high spirits this morning, Miss Spraggatt,” said Gerard ; “ but they are natural to him, I believe ? ”

“ Yes, Mr. Gerard ; ” replied Lucy, “ that is they used to be, and indeed when either my mother or myself are present he is always cheerful. But——”

The hesitating manner with which she said this, and then her sudden pause, assured Gerard that Jack was not such a clever actor as to deceive the sister who loved him.

“ You were about to add something more,” said Gerard.

The tears came into Lucy’s eyes, and she rose and closed the door leading into Jack’s room, having first satisfied herself that her brother was

not there. She returned and took her seat again quietly at the table, and looking at Gerard as she had never looked at him before, for her eyes, were full of sorrow, she said, almost in a whisper—

“Mr. Gerard, I know you are my brother’s friend—one that he values more than any other in the world—and I have longed for some days past to speak to you concerning him. For many weeks before my sister’s marriage, I observed a great change in him. Whenever our conversation turned on that subject—and it did so necessarily very often—I have seen his expression alter, as though our, perhaps, silly talk of dresses and arrangements pained him. Sometimes he would leave the room; but if he remained, he seemed by an effort to recover his usual cheerfulness, although his banter would now and then sound very like remonstrance.”

“I fancy,” said Gerard, as Lucy again paused, “that Jack was not over pleased with your sister’s selection. That was, perhaps, the cause of what you observed.”

“I thought so, too,” continued Lucy, “until

the wedding day had passed, but the hearty manner in which he received Mons. Fichard convinced me he had overcome his objections, for Jack is no hypocrite, unless he is now practising an hypocrisy, which God forbid."

For a moment her tears choked her utterance, and then would have way.

"May I venture to ask," said Gerard, "what you now think?—that is, if you believe that I can be of any service."

"Yes, Mr. Gerard, and it is because I think you may be of service to my dear brother, that I have been so bold, as to speak to you now. I am sure he has some secret sorrow—some grief which he will not let me share. It is nothing shameful, of that I am certain, but he fears to give me, perhaps our dear mother, pain by the revelation. What it is I do not guess even, but I cannot let him suffer alone and be silent, when so true a friend as you are to him is at hand."

"You make me proud to think I am so considered by you, Lucy. Tell me, do you think he is in love?" and Gerard smiled.

Lucy strove to smile also as she replied, “ No. Jack is too hard to please to be in love, I fancy. There was a most dear and beautiful friend of mine that we once thought he admired, and oh ! how happy I should have been had he done so ! I am sure he would not have been an unsuccessful wooer ; but shortly after my father’s death, Jack was so occupied with business matters that he avoided all opportunities of meeting her, and of late their intercourse has ceased altogether. No—Jack is not in love.”

“ What, then do you desire ? That I should endeavour to ask his confidence ? ”

“ Yes ! Yes ! Mr. Gerard, do not let him suffer alone. Tell him, if you will, that I entreat him to confide in you, or if he dare, in me—his sister. If his grief, whatever it may be, can be shared by me, implore him not to keep it from me, for there is nothing my love could not endure or strive to do for the dearest, kindest brother that ever a sister had.”

Gerard did not speak until Lucy’s tears had ceased, and she again looked at him for a reply.

“I will make the attempt, Miss Spraggatt, and I think I may not be unsuccessful”—the meeting in the yew walk coming back to him. “If I succeed and find that I can be of help to him, there is nothing I will not do. My power to be of service is very limited.”

“Oh, no!” said Lucy, the shadows all gone once more—“oh, no! for you can be his friend, his confidant; perhaps his adviser. And you will?”

Gerard took the hand she offered now, and pressing it between his own, vowed in his heart to be a faithful knight and do the lady’s bidding.

Before the growling old clock in the passage had struck the half-hour, the chaise-cart was at the door, and rods, creels, and hampers safely stowed away, with Jack ready to mount beside his friend, and only waiting to give Lucy a parting kiss, as ever was his wont. When her lovely face was turned upwards to receive her brother’s salutation, Jack started and paused for a second; but Lucy threw her arms around his neck, and kissing him a score of times ran into the house, and waved them good-bye from the window.

Jack gave a short cough as they drove away, as though something had displeased or surprised him. He was almost sure that Lucy had been crying. Why? Gerard could not have been saying anything to annoy her, or— No, he was too true a gentleman to cause her pain in any way, and to excite false hopes would be to do a cruel thing. So Jack soon recovered his good spirits, and on they went to Drayton Waters, where a man was waiting to take the chaise-cart and horse to the Drayton Arms.

The anglers soon went to work, and a gentle breeze, ruffling the surface of the water, gave promise of sport. We are unskilful in the practice of the gentle craft, and have preferred to take our trout and goodly perch in the pleasant pages of honest Isaak Walton (as it is the phrase to name that torturer of worms and live bait), and are free to own that in our own piscatorial essays, we have found our pleasure in the contemplation of the bright stream and clustered water plants, and flickering insects that haunt the drooping boughs, or when stretched at length beneath the umbra-

geous shadow of some stately tree, our rod and line neglected in the stream—we have watched the pale blue smoke our lips had breathed, curl upwards to the clouds, and called our dreaming, peace.

Nevertheless, we can imagine the ecstatic pleasure others have professed to have known at the success of their skill and cunning in hooking a two-pound trout, or a formidable jack, the tyrant of fresh waters, or, braver still, the noble salmon. How the prey was fairly hooked, and played, and landed, makes better after-dinner talk than much of the prosing of sages, philosophers, and politicians.

As Gerard Norwold and Jack Spraggatt were enthusiasts at the sport, both deeply learned in the entymology of the craft, and clever manipulators of silk and feathers to lure the wildest fish; and knowing exceedingly in all baits whether ground, live, or dead; it was no wonder, therefore, that Gerard on turning a bend of the stream, saw with great pain his friend leaning on his rod, and busied with other thoughts than how to fill his creel.

So occupied was Jack Spraggatt that he did not hear Gerard's approach until his friend's hand was upon his shoulder. The poor dreamer tried to wake without a struggle, but the sorrow at his heart made it impossible to conceal his agitation.

"My dear old friend," said Gerard, "again in the yew walk, for this good stream and this favouring breeze are nothing to you this day. Come, let us sit down and have a chat, Jack; for I am commissioned to drag this sorrow—whatever it may be—out into the light."

"By whom?" asked Jack, with a frown.

"One whom you love the most in the world, except your mother. Your sister Lucy! I have given her my promise to speak to you—and no better time than now. Let us sit down."

Jack obeyed, and, clasping his knees with his hands, looked gloomily towards the stream that flowed past so merrily.

Gerard then recalled word by word as nearly as he could remember, the conversation with Lucy, and as he did so, the face of his auditor

now flushing red, now overspread with a deadly pallor, revealed how closely the recital touched him. When Gerard had repeated all that had passed between Lucy and himself, he added :

“I have now told you all, and you will believe, my dear Jack, that I would not have attempted to obtain the confidence I ask, if your sister had not urged me to do so.”

“I know it,” answered Jack. “I know it. I saw that she had been crying, and was puzzled to guess the reason. Your question is soon answered. One little word tells all the story.”

“Love?” said Gerard.

“No!” exclaimed the other—“Debt!”

“Debt! is that all!” said Gerard, smiling. But the expression and earnestness of his friend almost frightened him.

“Is that all, Gerard Norwold? I told you on my sister’s wedding night that you could not understand the nature of my sorrow. That all! There is not a good gift that God has given me—loving relatives, earnest friends, health, cheerfulness, a pleasant home, and welcome labour which

is not changed into bitterness by that accursed debt. It comes to me in the dead of night and breaks my sleep. It stands by my bed-side when I lie down or rise up. It walks with me wherever I go, and sits at my table, only scared away by the effort of a strong will and a sense of duty to those I love."

"My dear Jack," said Gerard, when his friend ceased speaking, "try and calm yourself. Let us look this devil in the face, and see how we can lay him. The mouse once saved the lion, and I may nibble a hole in the net which enmeshes you. How stand matters?"

"You must have patience, and hear my story. Until two days before my father's death, I believed, whenever I thought of the matter—that we were wealthy—wealthy for our station, I mean. We all thought the same—my mother and sisters. My father sent for me two days before his death, and when we were alone, said to me: 'My poor boy, I leave you a sad inheritance, I fear; but you must not flinch from doing your duty to those who will soon have no friend but

you to provide for them. I will not dwell upon particulars—enough that he told me during the three preceding years he had met with great losses, and that every endeavour to retrieve them had only made bad matters worse, until he should leave me many difficulties to overcome as best I could, and which he believed, had his life been spared, he could have mastered. He died, dear, kind, ever loving father, and I took up the load he had laid down only beside his grave. Young and hopeful, I went to work with a will, but I found matters much worse than I had believed them to be. I, too, tried by bold ventures to redeem our fortunes, but all that I touched turned out a loss. Wool, hops, corn, all went against me, and now I see no help for it but to sell off all that we have, and pay our debts.”

“This is bad news, indeed, my old boy,” said Gerard. “You have friends—.”

“Yes, and they have stood by me to the uttermost, and must not be losers by me. To go on is to be completely ruined ourselves, and to ruin others.”

“Suppose the worst you have described inevitable, you are still young enough, and there is a new world opening, we hear, to all who are not afraid of work,” said Gerard.

“Do you think that it is for my own future—nay, my own present, that I care? No, Gerard, but when I see my mother’s grey hairs, and remember how many years of peace and honour she has passed beneath our roof—when I see my dear, dear sister, whose life has hitherto been clouded by only one sorrow—my father’s death, and know that there will be no longer a home for her—that she must fight the battle of life by my side, and share my fortunes, be they what they may, my heart grows sick, and I dare not—truly dare not, disturb their present peace, although I know their dreams must soon be roughly broken.”

For some time the two friends sat silent, Jack being exhausted by the pain his confession had occasioned him, and Gerard, bewildered by the difficulties which presented themselves, necessarily, to one unused to business complications.

“I have been thinking,” said Gerard, after awhile, “what you ought to do with regard to your sister. You do her a wrong in not confiding your position to her. She will not be so unhappy in knowing all you have told me as she is now, doubting the cause of your distress. She ought, also, to be prepared for this change, if it be unavoidable ; or, who knows ? her cleverness may devise some mode of extrication for you.”

Jack shook his head at this last improbable contingency, and did not reply at once ; but springing to his feet, he took his rod and began whipping the stream in, as Gerard thought, a most inartistic manner. His success was commensurate with his unskilfulness, and he returned in a quarter of an hour with his creel no better stocked than when he started. He held out his hand to Gerard, and said, “My dear friend, I have decided what to do ; I will take counsel with Lucy—and you, if you will be of the party. I will look matters boldly in the face, and if it must come to an end in England, why be it so. I have a friend there who is doing well.

He has been some three years in the colony, and sends home very cheering accounts of his success; and what he has done, I may do. So no more at present, but as you have been cheated of your lunch, let us go at once to the Drayton Arms and have dinner."

They soon reached Mrs. Morgan's little roadside inn, and put the worthy hostess into a fluster by arriving an hour before the time appointed; the more so, as it was hay-making time, and the labourers at the adjoining farm were waiting for their "'lowance o' beer.' The two friends, therefore, expressed their willingness to wait Mrs. Morgan's leisure, and strolled into the garden.

A rough country lane ran at the bottom of this garden, and as Jack Spraggatt stood looking over the hedge two men in a higgler's cart drove up. The driver was a powerful flashy-looking fellow, his broad-brimmed hat cocked knowingly on one side, and his sharp fresh-coloured face peering out of a series of bandana handkerchiefs tied loosely round his neck. He wore a fustian shooting coat with large metal buttons, relieved

by a faded livery waistcoat. Altogether, he was not a very presentable person. His companion was less objectionable in appearance, at least as much as could be seen of him, as he was nearly buried in a hat much too large for his head, whilst his neck and chin were lost in the folds of a worsted comforter, despite the heat of the weather. A velveteen jacket, as much too small for him as his hat was too large, was kept together by a piece of string, and he held between his knees a narrow square box carefully covered with green baize, and which he embraced with both arms, as though he owned a treasure that he was prepared to defend with his life.

“Hallo, mister,” said the driver, addressing Mr. John Spraggatt; “is this the way to the Drayton Arms?”

“Yes; the next turning brings you into the main road,” replied Jack.

“Much obliged,” said the man. “My friend here in the hat undertook to pilot me; but, as he always travels a-foot, he brought me down this infernal rutty road, which has been nigh breaking

my springs and sending my fowls into fits.—Much obliged,” and then he drove on.

“Who was that, Jack?” asked Gerard.

“I don’t know. A queer-looking fellow, whoever he may be, and one I shouldn’t like to meet on a dark night, without a thick stick for my companion.”

“I know his voice,” said Gerard. “I seem to have heard it very lately, and under unfavourable circumstances. Ah! I remember now; it was on the night of the wedding. He spoke to me in High Street.” Gerard then narrated, for the first time, the conversation he had had with the strange man who was so inquisitive about Jack’s household.

“That was a strange meeting,” said Jack, “and connects itself with an unpleasant circumstance which occurred on that very night. I have never spoken of the matter at home, as my mother is a very nervous woman, and I did not wish to alarm her.” Jack then acquainted Gerard with the attempt which had been made to force the window, and also the result of the first visit of the burglars.

“And who was the man you thought you recognised?” asked Gerard.

“No, that would not be fair to the man I suspect,” replied Jack. “It is more than probable that I was mistaken. We will have another look at my friend the higgler when we have had dinner.”

Mrs. Morgan soon announced that Lucy’s good things were on the table, and the two friends, both relieved in mind by the morning’s revelations, enjoyed their meal as though there was not a care in store for either of them. Who that has lived out half his life would seek to raise the veil which shrouds the future; for though the present has its sorrows and its trials, there is hope to sweeten the bitterness of the cup.

The gentle breeze which had rippled the water in the morning had gathered strength as the day advanced, and brought up a thunder-storm, which soon drove the haymakers from the field, and some of them sought shelter in the Drayton Arms. The rain continued after the thunder had ceased, and then from the tap-room came

sounds of a jingling melody, which defied the knowledge of the two friends to determine by what instrument they were produced. Their curiosity became so excited that they resolved to seek out the minstrel in the tap-room, and found, on proceeding there, that it was the higgler's companion, and that the mysterious case which he had carried between his legs was a box strung with wires upon which he performed, by beating upon them with two sticks, and producing the jangle which they had heard. The minstrel was uncovered, and showed to his delighted auditors a round smiling face, in which were inserted a pair of bright piggy eyes, peeping about from beneath two shaggy brows, attached apparently to his straight coarse hair, which had been cropped by some artist, who was insensible to the advantages of what a scientific operator would call "pointing."

On the settle which occupied the now fireless ingle, sat the higgler, smoking his pipe and carefully scrutinising the assembled rustics. He only gave a momentary glance at Gerard and

Spraggatt when they entered the room, as though he considered he had made a sufficient acknowledgment for the civility of the morning.

“And what do you call that instrument?” said Jack, when the player had ended his tune.

“Dulcimer!” answered the minstrel; “thirty years old; belonged to my feather. He played it, too. Like a song, gentlemen? I sings as well.”

The proposal was accepted without a dissentient voice, and the musician proceeded to administer a course of verses which left the two friends in a state of mental prostration from their endeavour to extract the meaning of the muddle of sounds he uttered. As Gerard, with Jack’s assistance, contrived at a later period of the afternoon, when they had secured the services of the minstrel to themselves, to take down his utterances, we venture to transcribe them, regretting that we cannot convey the tune, and the manner of the minstrel as he gravely delivered himself of the following copy of verses:—

1.

“I'll spread these green bushes although I am young,
So well do I like my love, so sweetly she sung—
Was there ever a mortal in so happy a state,
As I'd be with Floro, fair Floro so swate ?

2.

“I'll go to my Floro, and to her I'll say,
‘We both will be married, it wants but one day.’
‘One day !’ says the fair one, ‘that day is to come;
To be married so early, my age is too young.

3.

“I'll first go to sarvice, and when I return,
We both will be married in the next town.’
‘Will first go to sarvice ? and leave me to cry !’
‘O yes, love ! fine shepherd ! I've toud you for why.’

4.

“As it happen'd, to sarvice, to sarvice she went,
To wait on a lady it was her intent ;
To wait on a lady, a lady so gay,
Who clothed fair Floro in constant array !

5.

“A twelvemonth, or better, a letter he sent,
He wrote a few lines to know her intent ;
She wrote ‘that she lived so contented a life,
That she never, no, never ! ’ud be a poor shepherd's wife.’

6.

“These words by experience appeared like a dart,
‘I'll pluck up my speerit, and cheer up my heart !
In hoping she never might write so no more,
Her answer consumed me as ofttimes before.

7.

“‘My yows and my lambs too I'll bid them adieu !
My ship-crook and black-dog, I'll give them to you !
My bagpipe and budget, I leave you behind,
Since Floro, fair Floro, has changèd her mind !’”

The rain having ceased at last, the higgler and his bard prepared to take their departure, and were on the point of doing so, when two of the county constabulary drove up, and somewhat peremptorily ordered the higgler's cart to be taken back into the yard.

"What's up now, gentlemen," said the higgler; "you seem to know my business better than I do myself. I don't want to stay here now the rain is over."

The county constables were not accustomed to be addressed so familiarly, especially when on duty, and by a person of the higgler's questionable character.

"Don't you make a noise," said one of them. "Just step this way, whilst we have a word of a sort with you."

"No objection in the world," said the higgler, "so that neither on you is a member of parliament, and wants to talk by the yard. After you's manners—Oh! if you wish it certainly," and the burly fellow swaggered into the little parlour where Jack and Gerard were seated.

“Ask your pardon, gentlemen,” said the higgler, not allowing either of the officials to speak. “Ask your pardon for intruding, but I do so at the request of these intelligent gentlemen, who will now, perhaps, explain what is their little game in detaining me.”

The young friends were both known to the county constables, who briefly apologised, and then explained the purport of their visit.

It seemed, according to their statement, that for some time past many burglaries had been committed in the county, and evidently by London thieves. It had been ascertained that wherever a robbery had been effected the higgler and his companion had been seen immediately afterwards, as some said, and often before, as asserted by others. The magistrates had, therefore, issued a warrant for the two men, and they had been followed to the Drayton Arms, and intercepted as we have narrated.

“Very well, gentlemen,” said the higgler, “you have got hold of some valuable information, and I wouldn’t mind laying glasses round

that some day you'll see a hole through a mill-stone. Now, just hear what I've got to say. You and your masters do this at their peril; I am an honest man, following an honest calling, and so is my musical friend in the hat. I am engaged in finding a particular breed of five-toed hens for a noble lord in London, and that takes me about to many places in and out of your county. However, duty is duty, and I know you must do as you're ordered. I make no resistance, nor does little Dulcimer. Only I wish to say this, that I'll bet you more glasses round that I'll meet you here, or at any house in Morden to-morrow evening, provided I have my hearing in the morning."

"Why, you impudent fellow," said Gerard, unable lenger to keep silence. "Do you fancy I do not recognise you as the man who spoke to me, some four nights ago in High Street?"

"Mr. Gerard Norwold has good ears," replied the man, making a bow, "and I never contradict a gentleman. Now, my men," addressing the constables, "we are with you—I've only one

more thing to say; be careful, very careful of little Cobby's dulcimer, for at the price he sets upon it he'll ruin you in damages, if you injure a wire."

The officers and their captives soon drove off, Jack and Gerard watching them from the inn window, little dreaming then, how much the after life of both of them was to be influenced by the burly higgler.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HIGGLER APPEARS IN A NEW CHARACTER,
AND DISCOVERS SOME UNUSUAL GRIST AT THE
MILL.

IN the morning Jack Spraggatt acquainted his sister Lucy with all his troubles, and Gerard, who had arranged to assist at the family council, was delighted when he arrived to find them sitting in the summer-house, and talking cheerfully of the future. "We both owe you a thousand thanks, Mr. Gerard," said Lucy, "for compelling this naughty boy to admit me into partnership in his tribulations. They are sad ones, truly, but if I understand them rightly, as I think I do, I see no cause for despair."

"No, no!" cried Jack. "Nor do I now."

"Jack has one sad fault, Mr. Gerard; he is deficient in self-reliance. He will not look at the future as a field wherein he may win victories,

but strews it over with the dead hopes of the past, and is ready to surrender to the first difficulty that approaches. Is it not so?"

"Yes. I own it," answered Jack. "I do fear the future when I see how many interests beside my own are in peril from failure upon my part. Lucy, dear, you should have been the man and I the woman of this family."

"If I had been, I would not have allowed my poor little sister to have imagined all kinds of dreadful things, when half an hour's quiet chat could have made her as happy as I am now, you naughty boy." And she gave Jack's broad cheek such a loving kiss that Gerard almost wished that he had been born a twin-brother of his yeoman friend.

"We have been reading over this terrible list of debts," said Lucy, referring to a sheet of foolscap paper which she held in her hand, and I see nothing to fear so very much. Our creditors are chiefly friends who have helped Jack through many difficulties, and I am sure would not withdraw from him now. We must all be more

careful of our means, and learn to speak that difficult word—No!—and so I doubt not in a few brief years to be emancipated from the slavery of debt."

"Spoken like a brave, true-hearted sister, Miss Lucy," said Gerard, "and Jack will be unworthy of you, if he ever shows the white feather again."

"White feather!" replied Jack. "I hardly think I have been a coward. I never feared for myself; it was for those I loved—for those who had trusted me. My dear Gerard, may you never have like cause for such endurance. You have no reason to fear it, as riches, honour, station, are all before you! May they bring you the peace they should do when rightly used."

"Ah! Jack, never was there a wiser proverb than 'It is not all gold that glitters.' There are sad hearts often enough at Norwold Hall," replied Gerard. "That is the reason you are plagued so frequently with my company. My father's temper gets more violent, and now that he has a personal call from the gout, there is little cause

for any one to envy my lady mother-in-law. Our College bills arrived to-day, and such a storm was raging in the breakfast-room that I doubled back, and came on here to invoke your hospitality." Lucy rose instantly, saying, "I am so glad you have named it"—and then, pausing, she placed her arm around her brother's neck, and looked into his face so lovingly, that Gerard thought there was nothing in Norwold Hall either of art or luxury, that he would not have exchanged willingly for such deep sympathy as that look conveyed.

"My dear old Jack," she said, "we two may soon be all that is left of our little household. Our father awaits us in the happy land, and our dear mother is hastening fast to join him. Our sister Letty has a home apart from us, and we shall regard her by-and-by as one whom we have loved, but may see no more. We then shall be alone. From this hour, then, promise me, in the presence of your dearest friend, that no sorrow—no anxiety shall come to you without giving me my sister's share. As I have partaken

in the fruits of your labour and your care, I claim a right to have my portion of the ill. I cannot work with my hands, but I can with my heart, and a few words of honest love—perhaps of woman's wisdom, will make your burthens lighter. You promise to do what I now ask of you?"

Jack clasped her in his arms, and the big, stalwart man—we must chronicle truths as they arise—blubbered like "a great lubberly boy."

A brighter face, however, never shone through tears in the course of a few moments than Jack's; and the whole party, as happy as though all debts had been really paid, and had not to be worked for, hardly worked for, both with brain and hand, passed through the porch into Jack's parlour.

There was nothing uncommon in the components of Gerard's luncheon, yet never were viands so grateful to the taste, or nut-brown ale such incomparable tipple! It was the last pleasant meal Gerard was destined to have beneath that roof!

The last day's fishing which had passed so strangely was to be compensated for by another

holiday in the ensuing week, and Lucy was to be caterer again. Why should not Lucy and her favourite gossips be of the party also ? There were many pretty nooks by Drayton Waters, where they could dine and make merry, much better than in Mrs. Morgan's tobacco-smelling parlour. Why not ask some other pleasant friends ? and Jack should take down his fiddle from the peg, where it had hung for twenty months or more, and recover his finger-ing, and be prepared to make music to which the rocks and trees might dance if they pleased, like their classical ancestors. What a merry day was in store for them !

Time, the old scene-shifter, obeys no human prompter's whistle. The fates have written out his scene-plot, and as the changes are set down upon that scroll, so will they come and go ; and we, the actors, strut and fret our little lives away. The curtain will soon rise upon our story, and show a change indeed !

The saucy higgler had been as good as his word. When taken before the magistrates — Sir John

Norwold, despite his gout and ill-temper, being in the chair—the higgler bowed respectfully to the Bench, and appeared to be a very different man to the noisy blusterer of the preceding evening. The county constables gave their evidence with the usual circumlocution, and promised to bring forward witnesses to substantiate their statements, if the prisoners were remanded for a few days.

Gout and ill-temper concentrated in the person of a justice of the peace, are not usually favourable to the interests of a prisoner, especially when appearances are against him, and the higgler had taken some pains to place himself at a disadvantage, so far as his wardrobe was concerned ; and Cobby, the bard, though looking simplicity or stupidity itself, was not sufficient to counter-balance the unfavourable impression created by his friend, innocently employed, as he said, in searching for five-toed hens.

“ Well, man,” said Sir John, “ what have you to say for yourself? This cock-and-bull story of yours is not credited by the Bench. If you’ve

nothing better to say for yourself, and that other fellow who stands blinking like an owl, we shall commit you on remand as the constables require."

"Will your worship be kind enough to look at this letter," said the higgler, coolly.

"No written characters here, sir," replied Sir John. "We know how such things are concocted, eh, gentlemen ?

"I hope you will not decline looking at that paper, Sir John," said the higgler, very mildly. "It will save your worships a great deal of trouble."

"Here ! pass it to me—make haste, sir !" cried Sir John, to a slow moving usher. "You officers ought to have been prepared with your witnesses, and not have given the Bench so much trouble."

The letter had reached Sir John's hands by the time he had done speaking, and he read it with evident surprise.

"Dear me, very odd ! Gentlemen, we had better adjourn to our private room," said Sir

John, rising, the gout giving him an ugly twinge at the moment, and producing an expletive not quite in accordance with the judicial character.

As the J. P.s retired from the bench, the sensation in the small court-house was immense ! The only unmoved persons were the prisoners at the bar, until the higgler whispered something in the ear of the minstrel, which set that stupid person into limited hysterics. The magistrates' bell rung, and the spectators in court buzzed. Now for the explanation ! No—the two prisoners were ordered into the magistrates' room, and in a few minutes after an officer came out, to announce sulkily that business was over for the day.

In the afternoon, the mysterious higgler and his faithful minstrel were seen smoking their pipes in front of the inn in the market place, when the three o'clock coach from London drove up to change horses.

Mr. Gilbert Norwold had arrived by it, as well as a small parcel addressed to Mr. John Jones, and for which the higgler had made previous inquiry. He dropped it carelessly into the pocket

of his shooting jacket, and continued smoking his pipe until the coach and its attendant porters, ostlers and idlers, had departed. The parcel contained a letter, which appeared to dictate to the higgler a course* of immediate action, as he instantly walked rapidly to the court-house, and sought an interview with the town-clerk. We shall learn more of his business presently.

Gilbert Norwold's reception by his father was anything but affectionate or satisfactory. His College bills were large—very large—and contrasted unfavourably with the more moderate expenditure of his brother Gerard; and as this condition of things made Sir John's reproaches more acute, Gilbert felt the anger he had nourished in his heart for many weeks past against Gerard turn almost into hatred. Humiliated and wrathful, he sought his own room; and recalling all he had lately suffered by the inspiration of Gerard, the moral poison worked within him until it destroyed at once, and for ever, all brotherly union between them.

As Gilbert's return had been unexpected,

Gerard had gone with Spraggatt to a neighbouring market, and was, consequently, not at the Hall to receive him. Gilbert was glad of this; the more so, as he had resolved, when he could see his mother alone, to make to her the terrible disclosure of his turpitude. Lady Norwold, however, had been so distressed by her husband's violence in the morning, that she had retired to her own room, and given emphatic orders that she was not to be disturbed by any one that day. Poor lady!

Gilbert bore with this patiently, for he dreaded the ordeal, and gladly accepted the compulsory respite until the morrow. He was not destined to be the arbiter of his own fate.

The Miller Ray had just sat down to tea in his little parlour when the two county constables, who had been so at fault in the morning, entered the room without ceremony, looking like men who were sure of their game this cast. The miller started, naturally enough, at the advent of the two officers, who, without waiting to be questioned, declared him to be their prisoner.

“Prisoner! Your prisoner!” said Ray, with a loud laugh. “Why, you are mad!”

No, they were dull fellows enough, but they were not mad. They had their wits—such as they were—about them; for one placed his back against the door, and the other took his stand at the open window looking into the miller’s garden.

“We’ve a warrant to take you into custody, Mr. Ray, for the charge of being directly and indirectly concerned in several burglaries in this county and in London. The warrant’s signed by a Bow Street magistrate, and I produce my authority,” said one of the officers.

Ray glanced at the strip of paper, and did not laugh again, but attempted to pour out a cup of tea. His hand shook so violently that he abandoned the attempt.

“We are sorry our duty obliges us to trouble you with these,” said the officer who had spoken, producing a pair of handcuffs; “but we’ve no choice in the matter, and must do our duty.”

The miller’s powerful frame shook from head

to heel as the glittering manacles were extended towards him.

“ Stay, my good friends. I will not attempt an escape ; but you have taken me so by surprise —made such an unfounded charge against me—that I am quite unmanned. I’ll take a glass of brandy, and——”

“ No,” said the officer, interposing, “ how do we know it is brandy you are going to take. I hope you won’t be rusty, but let me put on the handcuffs like a man.”

“ You are right to be careful. I know it is your duty, and submit. You will not object to send one of my men with a note to Mr. Jellifer in the market-place ? ” said Ray.

The officer did not object, and Ray wrote a few lines requesting Jasper’s instant attendance. The man was called, he who had witnessed so unwillingly the signing of the papers a short time ago, and dispatched with the letter. Ray then sullenly submitted his wrists to the fetters, and the three men sat in silence until Jasper came in.

“What is the meaning of this?” said Jellifer.
“What has happened?”

“I am in custody,” replied Ray, deliberately measuring his words as he spoke. “I am in custody on the charge of being concerned, directly or indirectly, in certain burglaries committed in this county and in London. That is the charge, I believe, is it not?”

“Yes, sir; them’s the words of our warrant,” replied the officer appealed to.

“As the warrant is signed by a Bow Street magistrate, I shall be taken, I conclude, to London to-night.”

Jasper sank into a chair, and appeared to be overpowered by the perilous situation of his friend.

“I don’t want a woman’s nonsense, now,” said Ray. “I want a man to act for me. You must follow me to-morrow, if you cannot come with me to-night. You understand, and I shall expect you. You will take possession of the mill, and see that some one is put in charge whom you can thoroughly trust.”

"Oh, we shall take care of your property, Mr. Ray, depend upon that," said one of the officers, with a smile.

Ray smiled also as he replied: "You are clever, careful fellows, I don't doubt; but as I am certain to be acquitted of this charge, I would rather make my own arrangements."

Jasper promised to do all that was required of him, and when he shook hands with Ray, as the officers were taking him away, he found left in his own a piece of paper, which he carefully concealed until the final departure of the prisoner and his escort.

On opening the crumpled slip he read thus: "Secure all the papers in the H. C." Having read the line twice over, Jasper tore the paper into very small pieces, and then scattered them to the winds. If he understood the meaning of what he had read, he was too prudent or too good a man to aid a suspected felon in defeating the course of justice, and it was well for him that he acted as he did, for standing near the window, and looking into the room, was Mr. Higgler,

in a very different costume to that he was pleased to wear in the morning, as was Cobby, the minstrel, also. They now had blue coats, with metal buttons, and very bright red waist-coats, which they were entitled to wear as Bow Street runners. Cobby could not change his stupid face, but he had removed the straight haired wig and bushy eyebrows, and displayed his own short crop of bright red stubble, and no eyebrows at all.

“Well, Mr. Jellifer,” said Higgler, that being his proper name, and in no way connected with his ornithological calling, “my friend Mr. Cobby and I have come to relieve you from your responsibilities, and take possession of the mill for a short time.”

“Very glad to hear it,” said Jasper; “but I suppose I had better send some one here for the present.”

“Well, perhaps you had,” replied Higgler. “Cobby, call the other constable.”

Mr. Cobby proved his possession of other musical qualifications than those with which we are

already acquainted, and by putting his two fingers into his mouth, and distending his rubicund cheeks, he produced a whistle with variations that might have been heard, and possibly was, in the market place of Morden. A feeble squeal responded, followed by the appearance of another rural thief-taker, and who had more the appearance of a gamekeeper than of any other profession.

“Now, Master Johnny,” said Higgler, addressing the new comer, who stared at the name presented to him, “Now, Master Johnny, help my friend Mr. Cobby and myself to remove this iron chest.”

There was not much difficulty in effecting this operation, and when it was done a small trap door was discernible on the spot the chest had occupied.

“Locked, I fancy, Cobby?”

“Yes,” was the reply, “but you have the plan in your pocket.”

Higgler drew forth a piece of paper, on which were traced certain lines and references, and having consulted it, he went directly to the por-

trait, or Hassarac's Cave, and pressing the secret spring, obtained an insight into that ingenious receptacle.

Producing from it two keys, tied together, he soon unlocked the trap door, and discovered a Hassarac's Cave, indeed; for there lay, in admired confusion, much plate and many jewels. Amongst the former, the communion plate of Morden Church, battered and defaced, was conspicuous. Higgler expressed no surprise, nor did Cobby, neither did Jasper, strange to say; but possibly he was prepared to learn the worst of Ray, having once had his suspicions aroused. A careful inventory was made of the various articles discovered, and then the iron chest was opened. It contained only Ray's account books, but one of them was kept in cipher. This Higgler secured, but upon Jasper objecting to its removal, on the plea that it might be wanted in the business, Higgler returned it to the chest with a knowing smile at Mr. Jellifer.

“Let us see what more is inside this respectable old party,” said Higgler, standing on a chair and

looking behind the portrait, “some more keys, a cigar box—extravagant rascal—a bundle of papers, and a cash box. I wonder what that contains? Nothing valuable I expect, as it is unlocked.” Mr. Higgler glanced carelessly over the contents of the box until he came to two pieces of paper enclosed in the cover of a letter. He read them very attentively, and then placed them in his waistcoat pocket. It was surprising how unconcerned Jasper had been throughout this discovery of his friend’s delinquencies, but there was a look of wonder in his face when Higgler pocketed the papers.

“Now, Master Johnny, ask for a sack, and you shall take these precious matters to the courthouse in the cart you brought with you.” The constable obeyed.

“You’ll have to stay here, Mr. Cobby, for a time, I fancy; but no doubt Mr. Jellifer will see the miller’s maid—of course there is one?—and take care that you are made very comfortable. Eh! Mr. Jellifer.”

Jasper undertook to give instructions to have

Mr. Cobby duly installed as master of the situation, although the miller's arrest had thrown his terrified household into considerable confusion.

The cart having received its precious freight, in addition to the portly persons of Mr. Higgler and the county constable, was about to be driven off, when Mr. Higgler beckoned Jasper to him, and said in a whisper, "Meet me at Norwold Hall to-night, at nine."

"At the Hall!" said Jasper, turning very pale at so simple a request.

"Yes, at nine o'clock, not a minute later, if you please, Mr. Jellifer," answered Mr. Higgler, like a man not to be questioned, and then gave the word to proceed.

Mr. Ray's case was very soon disposed of by Sir John and his fellow magistrates, who had been specially summoned; and the miller, escorted by another Bow Street runner, who had come down in the morning specially to take charge of him, left Morden for ever by the afternoon's coach.

Sir John had arranged to take an early dinner

with one of his brother magistrates, and though suffering slightly from gout, remained until nearly nine o'clock, not having been able to resist the temptation of some excellent old port selected by the late Bishop of the Diocese. He rode home unattended, and had nearly reached the house end of the avenue when he was surprised by Mr. Higgler stepping from the shadow of a tree and politely requesting permission to speak a few words with him in private.

“Why not have told me your business this afternoon, Mr. Higgler—I have had enough of justice for one day. Won’t to-morrow do?”

“No, Sir John, as I must return to London by the earliest coach I can get, and my communication concerns you and your family so nearly, that I am sure you’ll excuse me making so bold as to ask you to listen to me now.”

“What out here in this night air. No, I — if I do.

“As you please, Sir John, only it must be where we are alone,” replied Higgler.

“What’s in the wind now?” cried Sir John,

“Come along after me, Higgler—We’ll stop at the keeper’s cottage.”

The cottage was close at hand, and the keeper out on his evening round, so the wife was sent on to the Hall with the quiet old cob, and Sir John and the officer were left alone.

“Now then, Higgler, make haste and tell me your business. My gout promises to be troublesome to-night, and I want to get to bed early. What is it?”

Higgler had opened the door leading into the back kitchen, to satisfy himself that there were no listeners,—an act of professional caution,—and then standing by the table, at which Sir John was seated, he said: “When searching the hiding places in the house of the man Ray, this afternoon, I lighted in one of them, on two bits of writing, which as they have nothing to do with the charges under investigation, I took the liberty of putting into my pocket.”

“Well, what are they about? Let me see them,” said Sir John, testily, as his foot was getting rather painful.

“One moment, if you please, sir ; I fancy they will surprise you even more than they did me, and I wish you to consider them as coolly as you can,” observed Higgler.

“I’m always cool, sir ! Always when business is before me. Give me the papers.”

Higgler presented one of them, but as the light was failing, the Baronet requested him to read it, as he already knew its contents, and Higgler did so. It was Gerard’s engagement to repay any money advanced to his brother, and was worded as follows :—

“I undertake to repay you any sum you may advance, provided the money is forthcoming immediately. “GERARD NORWOLD.”

The date was within a month of the time of this conversation.

“What’s that?” cried Sir John, springing up and snatching the paper from Higgler’s hand. He hurried with it to the window. When he had read it, he exclaimed, “The young scoundrel,

I remember about that time he applied to me for 50*l.*, and I refused him. And then he had recourse to a common thief,"—but our page must not be sullied by the fearful words that came from the lips of the infuriated man. It was some time before he could speak calmly, at last he said: "Well, Higgler, that money must be paid, thief though the fellow be who lent it. You must see to that for me. Well, now for the other paper! What's that about?"

"I really fear to give it to you, Sir John, seeing how you are affected by your son's indiscretion."

"Indiscretion, why—but never mind, I have had my burst out, and I won't give way again," said Sir John, holding out his hand for the paper. He paused, however, and then asked Higgler to read it to him.

It was a sad record.

"'I hereby acknowledge to hold as security for the sum of two hundred and fifty pounds, advanced by me to Mr. Norwold,'" Higgler paused.

“ Go, on ! sir, go, on ! There can’t be anything worse than that.”

“ Don’t be so sure, sir,” said Higgler, who then continued to read. “ ‘ A miniature portrait of Sir John Norwold, set with diamonds. The same to be returned, when the said sum of 250*l.* is repaid to me.

“ RAYMOND RAY.’ ”

The date a day after the other.

Sir John did not move when Higgler ceased reading, neither did he say one word until a little stream of blood trickled from one of his nostrils. The relief thus afforded soon restored him to himself again, and he spoke much more quietly than he had done before during the interview.

“ My good fellow, you have rendered me a great service in bringing these papers to me. I don’t understand them at present, but I will before I sleep. My honour, the honour of all my family, dead and living, is concerned in this matter, perhaps. You shall not go unrewarded for your consideration. You see I am not quite myself

just now. I shall be in the morning. Don't you leave Morden without seeing me again, and I will hold you harmless with your superiors. Good night, Mr. Higgler."

As he said this, he folded the papers carefully one within the other, and placed them in his pocket, and, having repeated his valediction two or three times, strode at a rapid pace to the Hall, as though the gout had never been known to him. As the hall door was unfastened until the family retired to rest, Sir John entered freely, and passed at once to the drawing-room, in which were seated Lady Norwold and Gilbert, she having left her room on hearing of her son's arrival. They both were reading. When she looked up, hearing the door open, she was alarmed and terrified at her husband's appearance, as the blood had stained the large frill of his shirt, and his face was deadly pale.

"O my dear Sir John, what has happened? Are you hurt?"

"Yes," he replied; "but not as you suppose. Come with me; I want you!"

Gilbert sat panic-stricken as his mother left the room. No other word had been spoken than those we have recorded ; but he knew—he felt certain that his guilty secret had been discovered, and he was lost ! utterly lost ! He could not have moved ! he could not have spoken one word, even to have saved himself from ruin, for his limbs were powerless, and his tongue dried up within his mouth. No chance of escape ! None. All the evil he had done and thought, to hide this miserable theft, had been wickedness in vain.

Unless—he went on ? Ah ! there was another pact to be made with the fiend that had so tempted him ! Would he listen to it ?

When Sir John had reached the drawing-room containing Lady Norwold's cabinet, he paused, and looking his wife in the face, said slowly : “ Emily, on your honour as a wife—as a noble lady, answer me truly. Have you ever—for any purpose—at any time—lent valuables to *my* son, or to *our* son ? ”

“ My dear husband, never ! ” replied the wife.

“ Then open that cabinet.”

It was done.

“Take out your jewels. No; not those. Ah! that case.”

As she removed the object to which he had pointed, he took it from her saying, “What should this contain?”

“Your miniature; the one you gave me on your birthday the first year of our marriage.”

He opened it, and showed her that it was empty.

Lady Norwold gave a shrill scream—it reached Gilbert sitting in the drawing-room—and then she swooned in her husband’s arms.

Her cry brought some of the servants to her assistance, and when she recovered, and before Sir John could say more, she proclaimed her loss, but not knowing whom to accuse. When she became calmer, Sir John conducted her to the drawing-room just as Gerard had returned from his pleasant holiday with Jack Spraggatt.

“You have returned in good time, sir,” said Sir John to Gerard, before he could greet his brother. “Stand where you are until I have done with you.

You know a man, a dishonest thief, named Raymond Ray.”

“No, sir, I do not !”

“You are a liar, sir ! a liar to your father. Is not that your writing ?”—and Sir John showed him one of the papers.

“Yes, Sir John, I own that to be my writing ; but ——” Gerard paused, it was his brother’s secret, not his, that was asked of him.

“This morning that paper was in Ray’s possession, and yet you dare lie to me, and say the man was unknown to you.”

“I do not lie, Sir John, nor shall you say so uncontradicted,” replied Gerard, his blood rising at the accusation. “I own the paper to be my writing—the obligation to be mine, and for no unworthy purpose.”

“There was more money had from that man—a much larger sum.”

“Yes, there was a larger sum required and obtained.” It was Gilbert’s secret still that was demanded from him.

“On what security ?”

Gerard raised his shoulders merely in reply.

“Again, I demand to know on what security? If you do not at once reply, and reply truly, though you are my son—my heir,” (no! the oath must not be recorded), “I will turn you out into the world a beggar.”

Gerard knew his father’s violent temper, and guarded his reply,

“I cannot tell you the security that was given.”

“You dare not, you degenerate cub. You dare not confess that you have so far forgotten your father’s name, your dead ancestors, your own honour, as to own that you have stooped to be a thief, and the companion of thieves.”

“This is past endurance, Sir John Norwold. You forget that you are my father, and compel me to lose a son’s reverence. I tell you that you speak words you would not dare utter to any other man living that claims to be a gentleman.”

“A gentleman! You have lost the title to be called even an honest man. Read that paper, if the words do not blind you—there is evidence of your shameful theft!”

Gerard took the paper, and as he read it, a faintness overcame him, for he divined the truth ! Whilst he stood thus overpowered, Sir John, whose rage had risen to its height, turned to Gilbert, who almost crouched at his mother's side, and said with violent action and terrible words : " You knew of this ? You must have known of this ! and you were silent ? Speak fellow ! "

" He is my brother, sir. He is my brother ! "

Those words which the Evil One spoke by the mouth of Gilbert sealed Gerard's fate.

With fearful oaths the maddened father drove his generous son forth from his home that night never never again to stand beneath its roof. The father's curses clung about the walls long after they were uttered, and not even the purifying fire could destroy the memory of them !

CHAPTER VIII.

GERARD HAS NEED OF TRUE FRIENDS, AND FINDS
THEM. NOT SO MILLER RAY.

THE moon in the heavens was as bright as Gerard's young life had been an hour before, but at intervals it was obscured by clouds, black and impenetrable as the change which had come upon him. He remembered walking from the lighted drawing-room through the crowd of domestics assembled round the opened doors, and passing down the stairs and through the hall, out unto the park. He remembered passing down the old avenue, dark as a great vault, and seeing the glittering of the lights in the town of Morden, hearing all the while the loud voice of his excited father repeating the awful words which cursed him and sent him forth a wanderer. His walk through Norwold Park, from the Hall to the little bridge which crossed the mill-stream never

left his memory—never. He believed that he must have crossed the river without going through the market-place, but why he did so he could not conceive, as he remembered nothing more than this—that when he had crossed the mill-stream he entered the church porch—his dead mother was at rest within the church—and there he vowed never again to set foot in Norwold Hall ! Never to see his father's face again ! That when the night should have passed, he would be “as one that was dead.” And once he tried to pray to be forgiven his trespasses, as he should forgive them who had trespassed against him ; but he felt the words he uttered were only words. His thoughts were all entangled one with another ! The bright drawing-room, the dark avenue, the passionate father, the listening servants passed and repassed before his eyes, whilst the awful words which cursed him, and made him an outcast, were roaring in his ears.

Jack Spraggatt had put on his slippers preparatory to going to bed, and Lucy had risen also, when they heard a violent thud at the front door,

as though some heavy body had fallen against it, and then followed a rapid knocking. Jack had the heart of a lion, so he hastened to answer the summons; and Lucy, who was as brave as a loving woman always is, followed, carrying a light. Jack asked who knocked?

“Gerard Norwold.”

Absurd, that was not Gerard’s voice, those hollow, husky sounds. The door was opened at once, and there, with haggard face, great staring eyes, red as fire, and disordered hair,—no hat had been cared for—stood the dearest friend of the household, Gerard Norwold.

Before either Jack or Lucy could speak a word, he stalked into the parlour, and sat himself down in the chair which death had made vacant, looking not unlike the phantom of himself. Jack’s bold heart beat so fast that he could not question his friend; whilst Lucy, with ready coolness, mixed some brandy with water, and then held the glass to Gerard’s lips, who drank the draught readily. It revived him, and he seemed to recognise the place—the friends—and

then covering his face with both his hands, he gently sank down on his knees, and crouched, as it were, upon the ground.

Lucy and Jack knelt down on either side of him, and implored him to speak. Speak ! when great sobs were bursting from his heaving breast, and hot tears flowing from his burning eyes.

He suffered himself to be raised up after a time, and when he was calm enough to articulate words—the words were nothing, but his passionate utterance kept the listeners silent—he said :

“ My friends—my only friends now in the world, I have come to you in the excess of my misery—I know not why—I know not for what—but I have come here without reasoning—by the mere instinct of our long friendship, Jack—and of yours, Lucy Spraggatt—knowing I should find some human thing that would not look at me like a fiend, curse me like a fiend, and drive me out into the world as though I were the wickedest creature living.”

He paused, but before either of his auditors could speak, he went on as though unwilling to

be interrupted, until he had “unpacked his heart.”

“To-night—to-night my father—before his wife, before his servants, has called me a thief, and with horrible, most horrible curses, turned me out of his house. Do either of you believe me a thief?”

He started up, and looked at his two listeners.

“I see you do not. If I had seen the shadow of doubt in your face, Lucy, or in yours, Jack, I should have gone mad!—stark mad!”

Again the sobs and tears!

“Gerard Norwold a ——. No! I will not repeat the word,” cried Jack. “Nor can I guess why such an epithet could be applied to you—and by your father?”

“Yes, by my father! my own father! No inquiry! No consideration of circumstances! But a conclusion formed in passion, in madness! and he has dared to stigmatise me—his heir—his own flesh and blood, as a thief! a mean, dis-honourable thief! And those who listened believed it; for not one of my kindred, not one of

the servants, who had known me from my cradle, dared to deny the possibility of such a name being deserved by me."

He walked rapidly up and down the room, and no one spoke for some time.

"I confess, Gerard," said Jack, "that I am at a loss to understand what has happened. If it will not distress you, tell me; or perhaps you would rather go to rest, and in the morning——"

"In the morning, Jack, I hope to be many miles away from here. Don't interrupt me, if you please. I wish, when I can master myself, to tell you what has occurred."

"Perhaps, Mr. Gerard, I had better leave the room," said Lucy.

"No, Lucy—no—I wish you to hear from my own lips a story that will be repeated, I doubt not, often enough when I am gone. I could not endure to think that you should ever have occasion to blush that you have owned me for a friend."

He then as calmly as though nothing particular had occurred, revealed the events of the evening,

from the time he had parted from Jack, dwelling upon the minutest details, naming the people he had seen, the objects which had attracted his notice, as though he were anxious to delay reaching that point in his narrative when his father made the cruel accusation against him.

“From that time,” he said, “I remember nothing distinctly, except my father’s awful curses, and his damnable accusation. If anything else was said, I heard it not—I saw nothing but that incensed and cruel man, until I turned away to quit his house, and then I met the glaring faces of the servants! I know that they stood on either side to let me pass through them—that the hall-door was open^o to hasten my departure. That the avenue looked like a monstrous vault, which the glittering lights beyond made darker and more dismal. I turned to look back once upon the old Hall. It was discernible only by the lights seen through the windows. A momentary burst of moonlight fell upon it, and then the dark thick clouds hid it again. I stood in the church-porch, as it were, by

my mother's grave, and vowed to renounce home, name, and kindred for ever; and I will keep my oath. How I came here I know not. I know that you two were every now and then in my mind, and so I wandered on, I suppose. You have heard my story—Lucy—Jack—and when it is told by others, I know you will deny—as I do now from the depths of my heart—that I ever did knowingly, a dishonourable act in my short life. Now, good-bye, my dear old friends. Give me some covering for my head, and I will be off again."

"Not to-night, Mr. Gerard."

"Yes, Lucy, to-night. In the pauses of our conversation I have resolved upon the course I mean to take. If that proud, passionate old man has one spark of a father's love in his heart, I will blow it into a flame which shall torment him to repentance."

"Surely," said Jack, "you will make an effort to disprove the charge made against you."

"I might have done so had I had a father to deal with, and not a madman. To free myself, I

must condemn others to the same fate as that my father has decreed to me. The vow I made to-night—rash, wicked, as it may be—I will keep. My dear friends, good-bye. I am obeying my father, my wicked unjust father, and parting from you is not the least of the miseries to which he has condemned me."

"Oh, Mr. Gerard," cried Lucy, clasping his hand in hers. "Do not! do not go away to-night with such a troubled spirit as now possesses you. Stay here until the morning;—stay here until you have prayed to God to guide you aright, and go not away with only your great wrong and your bitter grief to direct you. You have always been good, noble and generous, and be sure that your father will remember this to-morrow, and know that he has been deceived, and you will be dearer to him than you have ever been, and he to you."

"Lucy, he has cursed with the words of a fiend—he has believed me capable of dishonour. Neither love, nor the recollection of what my past life has been, weighed as one feather in my

favour. He has driven me forth, and the punishment shall be shared between us ! I can endure, and I will revenge my wrongs."

"It is right to endure, it is wrong to revenge," said Lucy, as though a reproving angel spoke. "Do not, Mr. Gerard, leave us to-night. Stay here for a few days, at least, until you have recovered from the first shock of this unaccountable injury. You cannot find more truthful, loving friends than you have here, and you have seen in our own case so recently that it is not good to bear our grief alone. Think me your sister, Mr. Gerard, and believe what I would do to comfort you in this distress. The neglected scratch, so slight in itself, grows dangerous and painful ; the ghastly wound, deep almost to death, is rendered often an aid to future health when carefully tended, even by unskilful hands. Let us be your surgeons, Mr. Gerard. Do not leave us with this great wound in your heart, which may become so dangerous as to destroy your peace of mind for ever."

"You will stay, Gerard, I am sure you will," said Jack, trying to take his friend's hand ; but

he drew it away, closing his fingers firmly together.

“ I dare not stay near that accursed house yonder, remembering what has been said, and knowing who are within its walls. Chance might make me a parricide. No, I will fly beyond that danger. I dare not pray, or I would say, God bless you both.”

“ Stop one moment, Gerard!” He was moving towards the door. “ Since you are determined to go, you must not go alone ; I shall go with you. Lucy, my boots, dear.” His sister was not surprised at Jack’s resolution. She knew that he would not desert his friend in the strait in which he was, and left the room, returning in a few moments, bringing a fur travelling cap belonging to herself, as all her brother’s head-gear was much too large for Gerard.

“ What is this ? ” he said. “ I remember ! your travelling cap, Lucy. Thanks ; I am glad to carry something of you with me. It will help to keep down evil thoughts, perhaps, and to remind me that one spot on earth contains two friends true

as steel." As though it were a thing of course, he took her head between his hands, and kissed her forehead. "I will go into the porch whilst you get ready, good, true, honest, old Jack," and then he left the room.

Jack soon pulled on his boots, and stowed away the flask which Lucy had filled, and hastened to join Gerard; but when he looked into the porch no one was there. He called "Gerard! Gerard!" but no answer came. Jack hastened to the road, but the night was too dark, and the light wind rustled in the trees, so that he could neither see nor hear anything of the runaway. With a heavy heart, Jack returned into the house, and then he and Lucy sat long into the early morning talking of poor Gerard and his changed fortunes, and sowing seeds that bore abundant fruit hereafter.

It was eight o'clock when the tidiest of old ladies was surprised at her breakfast by the appearance of Gerard Norwold. Her little hand-maiden was surprised also to hear her mistress cry with delight, and hug that road-stained,

haggard-looking man to her capacious bosom. He had often lain there when a helpless babe, and drawn from its living fountains the life he now valued no longer. Yes, Mrs. Bland had been Gerard's nurse, as after he was born his mother was long an invalid, and Gerard owed much of his iron constitution to the then buxom widow Bland, whose only child had died the same day as her young husband. Baby Gerard therefore succeeded to all the poor widow's love, and as her mother's fancy saw in the heir of Norwold's face the lineaments of her own dead child, he became to her a son indeed, making her love almost idolatry. Gerard never passed a vacation without visiting Nurse Bland frequently, though she lived some ten miles from the town of Morden. No wonder, then, that he brought his bruised heart to her for cure.

It was strange, he thought, that she had not been the earliest remembered when the blow came,—even before Jack and Lucy,—and so thought she when he had told her the story of the past day and night.

“ My darling boy, my dear darling boy,” said the old nurse—all the motherly feelings of other days returning, “ I never thought this hour would come, although your beloved mother often foreboded some such evil times. Sir John was always a vile tempered man ; brutal ever, when his angry fits were on him ; and they were so frequent that they wore away your mother’s life long before her time. When she felt that she was dying, she said to me—oh ! so calmly—so sweetly. ‘ Nurse, I shall soon leave you, and my dear child will have no mother then but you. Care for him as you have done ; and for his sake, and for my sake, bear with my husband’s fearful temper, and do not be driven from our darling boy. You promise me this ? ’ I did, of course ; and kept it through many and many a day of sore trial, Gerard. Your mother went on to say : ‘ Nearly all my small fortune I have given at various times to help my husband in the payment of his debts. There is, however, enough in this pocket-book to keep you from want, and find you a humble home. Earn it, dear Nurse,

by what you will have to bear for the love of my darling—for the love of his dying mother?’

“I did bear what few could have borne; but you had been sent to me by Heaven when my own sweet babe and his honest loving father had been taken from me: and I loved you dearer than my life. Thank God that you have come here in your trouble. It is your mother’s home that shelters you. It is your mother’s bounty that I now ask you to share.”

Poor Gerard! The voice of the old nurse retained the same music as had soothed his earliest sorrows, and he did not resist when she laid his head upon her bosom. He soon recovered his composure, and then having eaten and drank, though sparingly, he retired to her bedroom—the nursery he called it, with the first smile his face had worn for many hours, and obtained the repose he so much needed.

He slept soundly through the night, and when he awoke he found Nurse Bland sitting by the side of his bed, as he had done hundreds of times before, when he was hardly more helpless

than at present. He was feverish and prostrate, but his old nurse was skilful in the healing arts required for his restoration, and by the end of the third day, he had talked over and over again the cruel past, but without finding any relief for the agony it occasioned him.

It was late in the evening when he bade his kind old nurse farewell, and though her tears fell fast, yet there was no hopeless sorrow in her honest face, and so with her we bid adieu to Gerard Norwold.

The river which flowed past Morden, a sluggish stream, widened on its passage to the sea, and receiving two important tributaries a few miles below the town, became a rapid river. On the banks, near the confluence of the lower stream, a coat and waistcoat were found on the morning following, and on the lining of both was written “Gerard Norwold.” Such a fact proved nothing, whatever surmise it occasioned, and when Sir John was told of the discovery, he laughed scornfully, and denounced it as, “A trick—a very stale trick, which could deceive no one but a fool.”

The time was approaching when he would have given all his wealth to have known the truth.

Jack Spraggatt was not so easily satisfied. As soon as the story reached him, he set off at once, and for three days continued his inquiries and search, on both sides of the river, and it was not until the third day that he be-thought him of Mrs. Bland, and that possibly her foster-son might have gone^{ed} to her in the hour of his greatest need. Jack met with a cordial welcome from the old nurse, by whom he was well known and esteemed, and after an hour's serious talk with her, he sought for Gerard Norwold no more, and ever after studiously avoided speaking of his friend's disappearance, although for some time both he and Lucy wore a slight mourning in memory of their friend.

We must return to the Hall, soon to be deserted for other scenes and unexpected changes. Sir John's rage had not exhausted itself on the hapless Gerard, and when he left his ancestors' house at his father's bidding, it raged for a time

against the guilty and terrified Gilbert. With the same vehemence as he had used in discarding one son, did he threaten to visit with a similar consequence any further disobedience on the part of the other, and almost included his trembling wife in this denunciation. A momentary compunction which Gilbert had felt at his brother's undeserved fate, and which might have impelled him to have confessed the truth had a gentler course been pursued, died away under his father's continued violence, and when he left the room, almost fainting with terror, he went forth like another Cain, fearing that his brother's wrong would cry out from the very walls. He walked into the garden, and the cool night air revived him slightly. It was well for him, he thought, that Ray had been taken to London before the discovery had been made, which was now only known to his father and the family. Yes, there was Jasper Jellifer! He might lead suspicion towards him, if he thought it would serve his ends. No, his mother was engaged to interest herself with Sir John, and Jasper would

not make her his enemy by uttering any conjecture that would injure her son. So he strove to lull his guilty conscience into a little peace.

Higgler had brought Jasper to the Hall to prove Ray's writing on the memorandum relating to the bracelet, which, strange to say, could not be found or traced anywhere.

Jasper's testimony was not required, as he was, of course, entirely ignorant of Ray's proceedings. He had believed him a clever pushing fellow, and as such they had had dealings together; but of his nefarious pursuits Jasper had never entertained a suspicion, and he feared that he should be a loser by the confidence he had reposed in him.

Mr. Higgler smiled as Mr. Jellifer made this statement.

Jasper was evidently a true friend either to Ray or to himself, for he had sacrificed the comfort of his home to secure the property at the mill, and had placed Mrs. Jellifer in possession. This lady gave little Cobby infinite trouble, as she was as restless as a ghost, and

glided about from one place to another, so, that the wary Bow Street runner, from professional habit, felt compelled to follow her, and neglect his beloved dulcimer, which was at once his solace and delight. There was no doubt Mrs. Jellifer had a reason for this inquisitiveness. Sir John had offered £100 for the recovery of the bracelet, and, as this liberal reward was, she thought, a secret between herself and Jasper, she set earnestly to work to deserve it; but the cleverest of us are but fools, and whilst Mrs. Jellifer was searching the mill diligently, Cobby was on the watch continuously, knowing her purpose, and would have pounced upon her and the treasure trove, and claimed half the reward. Mr. Higgler took a more direct course to discover the missing jewels.

Ray had been brought up several times before the Bow Street magistrates, and numerous charges of receiving stolen goods, both in London and the provinces, having been proved against him, he was committed to Newgate for trial. Newgate prison was a terrible contrast to the pretty home

which Ray had just quitted. It would have been terrible even now-a-days when so much has been done to mitigate the olden cruelties, when the prisoners within its gloomy walls were packed away like slaves in the hold of a slave ship, and lived like human devils, in the midst of profanity and drunken riot. The untried and the condemned were herded together, at the mercy of venal warders, who made a profit of their vices when they had money, or left them almost to starve if they had not the means to bribe their gaolers, or procure the necessaries of life. The grim smoke-blackened walls of the great London prison, were a sad exchange for the neatly-clipped hedges of the miller's garden, and the brutal songs of the half-drunken prisoners, for the twittering and melodious notes of the happy birds, and the fierce besotted faces which met him at every turn, for the pleasant flowers then blossoming in all their beauty. The murky cell and hard pallet, haunted by the memories of hundreds of criminals, some of whom had hung upon Tyburn tree, or had suffered out the remnants of

their evil lives in Van Diemen's Land, or the worse *Inferno* of Norfolk Island. Murderers, forgers, burglars, highwaymen, and even such as he, Raymond Ray, the tempter to crimes he had not the courage to commit, had preceded him as occupants of the narrow dungeon wherein he must abide until he also should go forth to endure for years and years the bitter lot of a transported convict. He could not sleep at first with such horrible thoughts always at work in his once clever-scheming brain, but exhausted nature yielded at last, and the gaol-bird ceased to flutter in his gloomy cage.

Jasper came to see him as often as the prison rules allowed him to do so, but then they spoke to each other with iron gratings between them, and the visitor left no hope behind when he departed. Jasper never spoke of the diamond bracelet, prudent man that he was, fearing to invoke suspicion of complicity in Ray's criminality in the mind of any chance listener. Not so, Mr. Higgler, who had requested an interview with the prisoner the day after his committal to Newgate.

“Good day, Mr. Ray,” said the officer, “I suppose you bear no ill-will to a man who has only done his duty, and will not object to a few minutes’ conversation with me.”

“None in the least,” replied Ray; “I have not too much pleasant society in this infernal place. What have you to say, sir?”

“I suppose, Mr. Ray, that you have calculated the chances of the game you have been playing so many years, and are not afraid to pay your losings manfully. You have had a long run of luck, but I fancy you see that you are beat at last.”

“I don’t know that,” answered Ray. “A jury may think me as innocent as I am.”

“No doubt of it,” replied Higgler, knowingly; “and if they do, your position will be a bad one. It is no use fencing the question with me, Mr. Ray. I could not, if I wished, make your case worse than it is, and you know it. I have not come to try to do so, but to see if I cannot square a certain matter between us, and make things easier for you.”

Ray's heart beat quickly, for he thought there was a hope of escape in the officer's words.

"I don't understand you at present," he said. "You must speak more plainly, if you please."

"I will. When I was searching the mill, I found two pieces of paper behind the portrait in the corner of the parlour. They had reference to certain money transactions between you and young Norwold. They had nothing to do with my charge against you, and so I have not produced them at present." Higgler paused, and then said abruptly, "What have you done with the diamond bracelet you had in pawn?"

Ray was too cool a rogue to be caught so easily.

"That is my affair, Mr. Higgler," he replied. "Why do you want to know, and what am I to gain by telling you?"

"I want to know," said Higgler, "because Sir John wishes it back again, and if you will put me in the way of restoring it, I will make him use his influence in high quarters to ease your sentence. That's plain enough, I hope."

"Sir John can do this, you think ; but will he ?" asked Ray.

"Yes. He will pay the money lent to any one you please to name. His family honour is concerned, you see ; and though he has turned his son Gerard out of doors, he don't wish the matter to go further."

"His son Gerard, did you say ?" asked Ray, earnestly.

"Yes. He's a rough customer, is Sir John, and the most violent old fellow I ever met. They say Gerard was his favourite son, and that he'll fret himself to death at his loss. Nevertheless, he cursed him both hot and strong, so that if, as the saying goes, 'Curses come home to roost,' I don't envy the old gentleman his lodgers."

Ray did not appear to hear what Higgler was saying, but sat lost in deep thought. His cool, scheming head was at work again in its old way, and he saw a chance of escape, unperceived by even the wily Bow Street runner.

"Well, Mr. Ray," said that officer, after waiting a minute or so, "what do you say ?"

“The bracelet,” replied Ray, “is with the man who lent the money. He has been a good friend to me, and I should not like to involve him in any trouble——”

“Jasper Jellifer?” asked Higgler, quickly.

“No. Not Jasper Jellifer, nor any such chicken-hearted fellow like him. I will think the matter over, Mr. Higgler. I conclude Sir John is to pay you for this business, and I will try not to spoil your bargain, if it don’t injure myself. Can nothing be done *before* my trial?” said Ray, with emphasis.

“Nothing. The other business is too clear against you, and you know it. Had there been only one case, *that* might have broke down—but there are four—and you must see that what you hint at is impossible.”

“I fear so,” replied Ray, sadly. “Well, Mr. Higgler, I shall know the worst on Tuesday; so come to me the day after, and we will talk over the subject again.”

Mr. Higgler shook hands in the most friendly manner with the man he had tracked down so

cleverly and perseveringly, and parted from him as pleasantly as he could have done had Ray been a pot companion at a tavern door.

Ray slept soundly that night, and the next also, although the morning which followed was to declare his future fate.

As Higgler had prophesied, the cases against Ray were proved too clearly to admit the least doubt of his guilt, and the twelve intelligent men in the jury-box retired, merely as a matter of form, to consider their verdicts, returning in a few minutes after each case to pronounce the word "Guilty," their faces beaming with self-satisfaction at their own acumen.

Then, police officer after police officer, stepped into the witness-box, and told how they had known the prisoner at the bar under many *aliases*. That he had been convicted of swindling, card-sharping, and other mean vices. That he had been long known as a trainer of thieves, and a receiver of stolen goods, but by great cunning and address had eluded detection, until London becoming too dangerous for him, he had

disappeared. That Mr. Higgler, from information which he had received, had found out his whereabouts, and brought him to trial that day. He was thought to have come of a good family, though no one, except a woman he called his sister, and Mr. Jellifer, a neighbour, had cared to own him for many years past.

The sentence was transportation for life.

The persons in court who had heard the trials, and the long catalogue of previous iniquities, stared with wonder, at the pleasant face and manly bearing of the convicted felon, who bowed respectfully to the Bench, and walked firmly, but without bravado, from the bar.

Ray did not sleep that night. The reminiscences of his bad life, recounted by so many witnesses during the past day, kept sleep from his eyes, and the wickedness he had done now began to be his punishment. With the daylight his hardihood returned, and when Higgler came according to promise, Ray had adjusted his mask again, and seemed an unmoved man.

“I have thought over what is to be done,” said

Ray. "You may tell Sir John that you have brought me to a state of penitence and confession, and so have earned your wages. When you have done that to your satisfaction, bring the old gentleman here, and I will make my own terms with him. I have more to restore to him than his wife's bracelet; and, valuable as that is, he would give a hundred times what it is worth for the other affair."

Mr. Higgler was rather astounded, and would have fished out Ray's secret if he could have done so, but abandoned the hope of success when the felon said :

" You have nothing more to gain by me, nor I by you. Make what bargain you can with Sir John, my words will be worth the money, be it what it may. As I shall leave here for the hulks in a few days, you had better make an early appointment. You will always find me at home, as I shall quit London without the formality of bidding adieu to my friends. I am not beat yet, Higgler; at least I hope not."

Mr. Higgler, again shaking hands with his

friend Raymond, as he now called him, took his departure, and calling a hackney coach, ordered the driver to proceed to an hotel at the West-end, where the Norwolds were expected to arrive that day.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FELON RAY DOES MORE MISCHIEF THAN
HE BARGAINS FOR.

MRS. JELLIFER had gone to London the day before Ray's trial, leaving Mr. Cobby, the man in possession, after thanking him for the constant attention he had paid her during the time they had been together. Mr. Cobby was not surprised at her departure, as the certainty of the miller's fate was known in Morden, and Mr. Cobby had more than once explained to Mrs. Jellifer the state of the law as affecting the miller's property in the event of his being found guilty of the offences with which he was charged. The Crown would then become possessed of all the felon's goods and chattels, and therefore there seemed to be no necessity for Mrs. Jellifer's supervision of the proceedings at the mill. On the second day

after the trial, however, when Cobby was relieving the monotony of his existence by performing on his beloved dulcimer, and by no means discoursing most eloquent music himself, he was surprised by the arrival of Mrs. Jellifer, accompanied by a well-dressed gentleman, and two men of humbler appearance.

Cobby went to the door to receive them, but Mrs. Jellifer wishing him a curt good afternoon, brushed past him into the house, and requested her friends to follow her. Mr. Cobby was a brave man, but he was also a small one, and with a discretion which was to be expected from one of so much worldly experience, he offered no opposition to their ingress.

“What’s up now, ma’am,” said Mr. Cobby, seeing the lady quietly seat herself in the easy chair he had just vacated, and motion the respectable gentleman to take a place beside her.

“What’s up, sir?” replied the lady, with a slight sneer. “If you mean by that to inquire why we are here, I beg to inform you that we have come to take possession of the mill and its

contents, and to dispense with your further attendance, Mr. Cobby."

"Dear me," said the officer, "I shall be sorry to have any difference of opinion with a lady for whom I have so much esteem; but you can't take possession, and you can't dispense with me."

"Indeed, sir, we shall see," replied Mrs. Jellifer.

"Yes, ma'am," said Cobby; "that gratification shall not be denied you;" and diving into a side-pocket of his coat, he produced a little brass staff and an official-looking paper. After carefully opening the latter, he proceeded: "this, ma'am and gentlemen, is a document which I have received this day from London, empowering me to hold, on behalf of the Crown, all the goods and chattels of Raymond Ray, a convicted felon, now lying in His Majesty's gaol of Newgate."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Jellifer, "then I am afraid the Crown will be disappointed for once, as this"—almost snatching a paper from the hands of the respectable gentleman—"as this is a bond or a bill of sale, or whatever it's called, making

over to my husband, Jasper Jellifer, as security for money lent, all that Mr. Raymond Ray was possessed of some time ago ; and now I leave you and our lawyer, Mr. Williams, of Lincoln's-inn-fields, London, to fight the matter out between you."

Mrs. Jellifer then rose and left the room.

The legal battle was not of long duration, Mr. Williams being well-known as a highly respectable person to Cobby, and he did not therefore hesitate to accept the assurance of that gentleman, that the document which gave Jasper Jellifer's claim the preference over that of the Crown, was perfectly valid, the more especially as Mrs. Jellifer returned, bringing with her from the mill the affrighted man who had attested the signatures of the parties to the legal instrument. Cobby was by no means cast down at this defeat, but, requesting Mr. Williams to give him a written declaration of the authority under which Mr. Jellifer claimed possession, he pocketed his sceptre and declared his willingness to abdicate.

"I thought we should make short work with you," said Mrs. Jellifer; "no reflection on your size, sir. And now if you will kindly remove yourself, and your box of music, as you're pleased to call it, to some other place, I shall be extremely obliged to you."

Cobby inquired whether it was absolutely necessary that he should retire so precipitately, and whether he might not remain until the morning, as his business in Morden would then be at an end, and he proposed to return by an early coach to London.

"Well, yes!" said Mrs. Jellifer; "you may remain conditionally."

Cobby inquired the terms on which his evacuation of the mill could be delayed.

"These," said Mrs. Jellifer, with savage emphasis. "As I intend remaining here to-night, to lock-up and make an inventory of certain things, I require that you tie up in its green bag that horrible instrument of torture upon which you are continually thumping; and that, if you want to sing, you go into the mill and remain

there until you have exhausted the contents of that 'Little Warbler,' which you seem to have swallowed at some time or the other."

Cobby was hurt, painfully hurt, at the mention of these conditions, and from that hour to the end of his existence, hated Mrs. Jellifer.

It was six o'clock in the evening when Higgler reached the hotel where Sir John Norwold was staying. The old baronet was in an execrable temper, two or three circumstances having occurred to make him more than usually unamiable. One was that he had been engaged with his lawyer for an hour or two in making a new will. He never paused halfway in any course which he had resolved to pursue; and in order to disinherit Gerard as completely as possible, he had willed to his son Gilbert all that he could devise to him. The entailed property was small, as during his father's lifetime Sir John had imprudently allowed much of it to be sold to pay the heavy election expenses incurred in contesting Morden. Another item was a list of the improvements required in Lady Norwold's wardrobe, and which she

declared to be requisite for her proper appearance in public. The slightest reference to such a subject always brought on a violent fit of swearing, and certain allusions to the domestic economy of the ancient Britons strongly adverse to the progress of civilisation. If he had lived in these days of crinoline, Lady Norwold would have gone into society a perfect fright had she conformed to Sir John's notions of amplitude as applied to a lady's skirt. Another circumstance which tended to his irritability was this, he wanted his dinner; and like other savage animals, he growled loudest when he was hungry. Mr. Higgler's mission was made, therefore, under a most unfavourable condition of things; and that worthy officer had to submit to numerous interruptions during the narration of his interview with Ray, all of which would have been distressing to a less regulated mind than that of the Bow Street runner.

It would be worse than useless to give the conversation in detail, as Sir John declared that he would have hung Ray without the formality of a trial, and expressed his regret that such a cata-

strophe was not awaiting that criminal person with such ornate flourishes of language as prevent repetition. The excommunication of the Jackdaw of Rheims might have been read (had that remarkable objugatory poem been written) as a blessing beside Sir John's maledictions. Mr. Higgler knew his man, however, and having heard a great deal of bad language in his time, was patient and enduring. He succeeded at last in obtaining Sir John's promise to meet him at Newgate on the following day, and to amply reward him should Ray's communication prove of the consequence he professed it to be.

Through the long weary night which succeeded Ray's last interview with Higgler, the wretched felon slept but little. The prison clock striking the hours and the quarters roused him from his feverish slumber, and he remembered that the passing minutes brought him nearer to the interview which might produce some mitigation of his dreadful doom, or destroy his best hope of any future peace this side the grave. And then he recalled his past evil deeds, and their bitter consequences to

others, and wondered that he had thought so lightly of the usual ending of such a life as his had been, or why he had put those thoughts, when they did come, so readily aside. He remembered also the few evanescent, unsatisfying pleasures which his evil gains had brought him. He had had, it is true, an unwedded mother and a libertine father, who was no father in his love or in the discharge of his duties towards his unhappy boy and girl, and who had allowed them to be reared in short-lived luxury, to be cast upon the world when death transferred his abused wealth to his high-born heirs, who would acknowledge no kindred with those whom the law refused to recognise. He thought of all this wrong, and sought to find some palliation for his own misdeeds in the selfish cruelty of the dead. But conscience would not admit the plea, and cried out “Guilty” almost as loudly as he had heard that fatal word pronounced in court not very many hours before.

Time, that stays not either for the just or for the unjust, brought the hour appointed for Ray’s meeting with Sir John Norwold.

Mr. Higgler was waiting to receive the baronet, and to usher him into the governor of Newgate's little office. Sir John had passed a sleepless night also, and looked haggard and nervously excited. He glanced with an angry look at the grim ornaments of the little room. Manacles of notorious malefactors, labelled with their names, as though they were relics too precious to pass into oblivion. Above them, on shelves, were casts of hideous heads, their features distorted by the violent deaths they had died—hideous also, from the crimes with which they were associated, and which had given them their Newgate value. There were two or three more precious relics of the gallows still than those memorials made by the hands of man: there were the skulls, the once living bones of departed scoundrels, not hidden out of man's sight in the earth, but kept as lures to the warder's show-box.

“The place smells of death,” Sir John said, and he desired to be taken to Ray, or to have Ray brought to him as soon as possible.

The latter civility might have been accorded

him had he been more regardful of the turnkey's feelings, and not spoken disparagingly of his criminal museum; but having offended the man's professional prejudices, Sir John was led through the gloomy passages of the old prison, along which many had passed on to "dusky death," until he came to the cell wherein Ray was confined, and where he now remained pleading illness, thus avoiding the necessity of taking his place in the felon's yard. As Ray rose up on the entrance of Sir John, his fetters clanked, and sent a cold chill through the frame of his visitor, although, as a magistrate, he was not entirely a stranger to the inside of a prison.

The warder stood waiting at the door until Ray expressed a wish to speak with Sir John alone, and as Higgler had supplied a liberal garnish, the turnkey expressed his willingness to retire, provided Sir John was not afraid.

"Afraid! What do you mean by being afraid, fellow? I never feared any man yet, and don't care for this manacled scoundrel."

The door of the cell, therefore, was closed, and Sir John and the convict were alone together.

“Now then, Ray, what is it you wish to say to me? I should not have come, but I have had so many surprises of late, that perhaps you may have something to astonish me, also.”

“I have, Sir John, or I would not have requested your attendance here,” said Ray. “You can well believe, sir, that a man with such a dreadful future before him as I have, may strive to get one ray of hope by a boldness which he would not have dared to exhibit under other circumstances; and as two matters which I have to communicate are of the gravest importance I believe to you, I must make conditions before I speak.”

Sir John was disposed to use harsh words, and to call bad names, but at last deigned to ask to have the conditions named.

“I propose to reveal to you the most important secret first, and I require your promise that, if my revelation be of the value I profess it to be, you shall exert your influence in my

behalf, and obtain some mitigation of my terrible sentence. I mean, sir, to obtain for me, when I reach my destination, some less severe task-work than falls to the lot of the common convict. It can be done—it is often done—and you can obtain this favour for me by asking for it in a quarter I can mention.”

Sir John did not reply immediately, not until he recalled much that had happened of late, and in some way connected it in his mind with what Ray had to tell.

“I promise to do what I can, provided your communication is of the importance you pretend it to be,” said Sir John.

“My second communication shall be made before I leave England, provided my first produces the result I hope for. Don’t be angry, Sir John. I do not doubt your word, but you may not estimate what I am about to say as I do. I trust to your honour.”

Ray then proceeded to narrate all that had occurred at the mill. How that Gilbert came at night to borrow the large sum of 200*l.*, bringing

with him no other security than Gerard's promise to repay the loan. He did not mention Jasper's name, and he had good reasons for his silence. He then described how, sympathising with Gilbert's distress at not being able to comply with his brother's requirement that the money won should be repaid at once, he had told Gilbert of the money-lender's conditions, and pointed out the possibility of help being obtained from Lady Norwold. How Gilbert went away taking the keys with him to open the outer gate, the time he was absent, and how Ray had met him on his return—exhausted, as he then thought, by his interview with his mother; how he threw the bracelet down, and the words he used when questioned. Ray then assured Sir John that he knew not until the day after his trial that the diamonds had been stolen (he did not say that Jasper had told him this), and that Gerard and not Gilbert had been suspected as the thief—Gerard, the noblest, most self-sacrificing gentleman that ever lived, and who had borne his father's anger rather than breathe a suspicion of his brother's dishonour.

As Ray dwelt on all the incidents of the narrative we have indicated briefly, the violent emotion of Sir John was painfully apparent, but Ray had his own point to gain, and did not pause to consider the effect he was producing on a listener of such a violent and excitable character as the man who sat before him.

As Gilbert's guilt became evident—as Gerard's innocence came to light, the struggle of the father completely overpowered him.

He started up, clutching at his cravat, and shaking his head to and fro exclaimed, "Let me out! Let me out of this infernal hole, or I shall be suffocated."

The warder heard him instantly, and on opening the cell-door Sir John rushed past him, and as it were by instinct, made his way along the passages until he reached the intervening gates, which he shook in his desire to escape into the air, and then with Higgler passed into the street, where a carriage was awaiting him.

"Come to-morrow—tell them to drive home!" was all he said.

Higgler watched the carriage out of Newgate-street, wondering what could have been the communication which had evidently had such powerful effect upon Sir John. He re-entered the prison, and went to Ray's cell, but the prisoner would tell him nothing, not one word of what had passed. Ray saw the effect he had produced, and did not wish to have it weakened by any interference of Mr. Higgler.

Ray did not deceive himself into the hope that his sentence would be revoked—he knew that was impossible, but he tried to recall all the stories which he had heard of criminals who had obtained concessions from the authorities in Van Diemen's Land, and who had by skill and honest-dealing risen to be men of wealth and position in the colony. He thought that the worst he should endure would be the miseries of the passage out in the transport-ship, trusting that the influence he had secured by the revelation he had made and had to make, would free him from the convict's chain and harassing labours. Why should he not thrive as others had done? He would

apply the cleverness he had hitherto used for dishonest pursuits to make himself a reputable position, and so end his days peacefully. If he could obtain the limited freedom accorded to many other convicts he could do this, for he had not been deprived of all his illgotten gains—no! thanks to his forethought—and there would be friends left in England who were bound to befriend him whenever the time arrived for the exercise of their assistance. So he comforted himself with this Alnascar's dream, although he had already unwittingly destroyed the fragile means which were to realise his pleasant anticipations.

When Sir John Norwold's carriage stopped at the West-end hotel, and the footman opened the door to let out his master, he was horror-stricken to see him lying back on the seat, apparently in a deadly stupor. His face was dark red, and one hand still clutched the white cravat, bound, as was then the fashion, tightly round the neck. Sir John was instantly removed into the house, and medical aid procured only in sufficient time to save him from instant death.

Lady Norwold had ventured during her husband's absence to send for her dress-maker, and was busy with silks and laces and other vanities when the carriage drove up to the door. She saw it arrive from the window, and terrified at the explosion of angry words which she believed would be sure to succeed Sir John's discovery of her pardonable delinquency, hurried her milliner and her goods from the room, herself condescending to carry a basket of no mean dimensions.

Poor lady! She was never to hear that angry voice again! Passion had done its work, aided by remorse, and the living man brought into her chamber was already as powerless for good or evil as the dead. Throughout the night he laid motionless almost, his deep stertorous breathing painful to hear, and it was well for one watcher by his bedside that he did not know whose act it was that had quenched the life of his father, and made him almost a parricide. That knowledge was mercifully spared him, but never throughout his after-life was that death-bed scene

forgotten. Before it quite closes we must return for a short time to the Elms.

Jack Spraggatt had evidently found another little skeleton, but he only concealed it for a day or so after his visit to Nurse Bland, and in conformity with his promise to Lucy, he made her a partner in his new possession. Nurse Bland had told him more of the circumstances connected with the expulsion of Gerard than he himself had done during their short excited interview; and Jack strongly suspected that his poor friend was bearing the consequences of some disgraceful act which his brother had committed. He had mentioned the conclusion at which he had arrived to the old nurse, and with which she appeared to coincide; but when Jack proposed to make some effort to vindicate Gerard, she peremptorily forbade him taking any action for that purpose, in compliance with the most earnest injunction of his lost friend. Jack was not satisfied with this state of things, nor was Lucy either, and they determined to set off at once to Nurse Bland and discuss the matter over again.

Had Jack known half as much as Jasper Jellifer, he would have gone at once to Sir John, and had justice done to Gerard; but the self-seeking, prudent Jasper could discover no particular gain to himself, but, on the contrary, the prospect of considerable loss by revealing all he knew of Gilbert's transactions with Ray, and therefore he preserved a selfish silence.

It was otherwise with Jack Spraggatt; Gerard's honour was as dear to him as his own, and he believed his friend to be utterly incapable of an unworthy thought. There were many circumstances not amounting to evidence, perhaps, which led Jack to conceive the possibility of Gilbert having been betrayed into the commission of this wrong; he had always been treacherous and cowardly, and Jack could not bring himself to believe that he was doing his duty by his friend without communicating his own suspicions to Sir John Norwold.

A short drive though pleasant country lanes soon brought Jack and his sister to Mrs. Bland's cottage. Its small garden was crowded with bright

blooming flowers and rose-bushes, among whose bells and leaves the honey-bees were busy from morn till night. The greenest of ivy grew midway up the cottage front, leaving its red tiles in no unpleasant contrast, as they were pierced with latticed windows, draped within by the whitest of dimity. As no cottage is perfect without a porch, this had one; and there Nurse Bland would sit on sunny days to knit or sew, and exchange gossip with a passing neighbour. The settle was unoccupied when Jack and Lucy stopped at the gate. The parlour and upper blinds were down, and no one came for some minutes in answer to Jack's lusty summons, although more than one of the inmates of the neighbouring cottages ran out to learn the cause of the knocking and shouting. At last the door was slowly opened by a purblind old man as deaf as he was blind, and from him Jack contrived to learn that Mrs. Bland was away from home, and he was left to take care of the house. He could tell no more, but he rather thought "that Master Piggott, at the shop,

knowed more about 'um.'" And so to Master Piggott they went.

He did know a great deal that surprised Jack, for he had never thought for a moment that Mrs. Bland at her time of life, and after having lived some fourteen years in her little cottage, could have invested Master Piggott, or any one else, with authority to let the house and sell by auction all her goods and chattels, save and except certain articles which she had distinguished by a chalk cross, and which were to be removed before the day of sale.

"They were matters of small value," Mr. Piggott said; "being two or three portraits of children, and such like, together with an old clock, which he believed had come from the nursery at Norwold Hall."

This news was a great disappointment to Jack and his sister, and set them wondering more and more, whether it was not their duty to see Sir John without loss of time; for it was evident that Gerard was either dead or had resolved to carry out his determination to return home no

more. In the first case Mrs. Bland had evidently left a neighbourhood which had, now, such painful associations; in the next, she might have resolved to share Gerard's fortunes, for all knew that she had the love of a mother for her foster-child.

They had just reached the Elms, when the sound of the horn announcing the approach of the "London up," decided Jack; so buttoning his great coat and giving the reins to Lucy, he exchanged his seat in his gig for one on the outside of the coach, and in due time arrived safely in London as the clock of the inn-yard struck nine.

A hasty toilet and a substantial breakfast having been accomplished, Jack set out for the West-end hotel where Sir John Norwold was lying unconscious of all around him. Whilst his name was being taken up-stairs, Jack heard with much concern the dangerous condition of the sufferer, and would have left at once had not Lady Norwold expressed a desire to see him. She had some vague idea that he had come from Gerard, and

had thought it right that the outcast should know the state to which his father had been reduced. Gilbert, also, connected the coming of Jack Spraggatt with his injured brother, and walked to the window when the young farmer entered the room.

The usual civilities were hardly exchanged when the nurse came from the adjoining chamber to announce that her patient had suddenly rallied, and, as she thought, had muttered the name of Lady Norwold. Her ladyship immediately followed the nurse into the bedchamber, leaving Jack and Gilbert together. Gilbert felt he was bound to say something, and therefore remarked—

“This is a sad state in which you find Sir John, Mr. Spraggatt.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Jack; “and by me quite unexpected. He looked so hale and hearty that one might have taken a lease of his life for years. I wished to have seen him very much—very much indeed!”

Gilbert made two or three efforts to speak

before he could even say—"On business, I presume?"

"Oh, yes, sir—on *his* business principally," answered Jack. "He was always a just man when—not in a passion; and he—" but recollecting to whom he was speaking, he paused; and then added—"But it is too late, I fear, to—too late!"

The silence which ensued was broken by the entrance of the nurse.

"Sir John has certainly rallied wonderfully," she said. "He evidently recognises her ladyship, and tries to tell her so. You can see him, if you stand here."

Jack accepted the invitation of the nurse, and looking through the half-opened door, he saw the father of his injured friend, propped up with pillows; his lips twitching slightly now and then, whilst his glazed eyes were fixed on those of Lady Norwold, who sat by the bedside holding his hand. He was dying, no doubt of that, and the last feeble rays of life just lighted up his face.

The nurse was called into the room, and instantly returned to request Mr. Gilbert to go to his father, as her ladyship fancied Sir John had asked for him.

The eyes of the dying man had wandered to and fro whilst these communications had been made, and when Gilbert went to his father's bedside they became fixed upon him. As soon as the confused mind of Sir John could comprehend the presence of his son, a redder flush suffused his face, his eyes dilated, and his breast heaved slowly, slowly, and then with a deep sighing the spirit passed away.

Two men who looked upon that bed of death and saw the dart strike home, remembered it in after years, one to find only remorse in the retrospect, the other to add another comfort to a happy life.

As Mr. Higgler had nothing now to gain through the agency of Ray, he paid no more visits to the convict, and that person, therefore, being dead in the eye of the law, might have been actually defunct for what anyone not interested

in his safe keeping seemed to care for him, and he left England unconscious of Sir John's death, attributing the neglect which he experienced to the want of honour on the part of the baronet, and to the callous selfishness of Higgler, who, having been paid for his share of the business, cared nothing for the poor tool with which he had worked. So, using a bad man's logic, he reasoned himself into the belief that he was an ill-used person, and resolved, if fortune gave him the chance, to revenge himself in the new world to which he was going. We shall meet with him again in after years, and learn how he prospered, and how he did a good turn when it was least expected.

Jasper Jellifer came into possession of all the late miller's property, Jack Spraggatt's wheat amongst other valuables, and it was calculated by those who took the trouble to mind other people's business as well as their own, that Jasper had made a very good bargain, although the money he had received might have been a little cleaner. Jasper always had been a lucky man, everybody

said, and by adding and adding honest earnings to the gold he had picked out of the dirt, his gains became so mixed, and grew so bright by being jingled together in the same bag, that there was no one in Morden who could tell one coin from the other, and therefore they came to respect lucky Jasper for a great deal more than he was worth.

CHAPTER X.

LUCY SPRAGGATT FINDS A NEW LOVER, AND
REJECTS HIM.

TWELVE months had passed since the death of Sir John Norwold, and it was well for Jack Spraggatt that his tangled affairs had given him constant employment to get them straight, or he might have thought more of the loss of his dear friend Gerard, and of the injustice he had suffered, than would have been good for his peace of mind; but he and Lucy had to exert themselves to the uttermost to surmount the difficulties which surrounded them. Jack needed all his sister's hopefulness and bravery to keep him now and then from desponding, as he would sometimes talk of giving in; but she always discovered some earnest way of going to work, and Jack only wanted such a prompter to play out the part which had fallen to his lot. Their mother had died in ignorance

of her children's struggles, and many retrenchments which could not have been made in her lifetime without exciting her inquiries became possible, and were made cheerfully. The accounts of the continued success of Jack's friend in New South Wales were every now and then arriving, and would set him thinking of a new home in that distant land; but then, his household gods had been set up so many years at the Elms that it seemed like sacrilege to abandon them for other lares, however advantageous the change might seem. His father's fathers had tilled the land around him, and their graves, and those of others whom he had loved, were in the neighbouring churchyard; and, foolish as it may seem, he thought that he could not put the seas between him and them. They were only mounds of earth to the passers-by, but to him they were green shrines where he had often stood and prayed that he might not bring dishonour on their honest names. A foolish fancy, perhaps, but all his life he had seen the seed which he had buried in the earth spring up into flowers and golden grain,

and so he could gather loving thoughts from the graves of his departed kindred. Lucy, too, had to be considered, and where could she be as happy as in the old house at home. She would marry some day, no doubt selecting a farmer for her husband, and then the Elms could be managed between them, for without Lucy the place would be home to Jack no longer. The gossip of the neighbourhood had already found her a match in the son of Mr. Hayes, whose farm adjoined their own. The old man was reputed to be rich, and his eldest son Robert would doubtless possess all, as the younger was, although not eighteen, a sot and an idle fellow. True Robert was not exactly the man Lucy was likely to fancy, as he was given to low sports, and had been known to have visited more than one prizefight. Such amusements were, however, countenanced by the highest in the land, and might be abandoned if he became amenable to a better influence. Indeed, Robert Hayes had said to more than one confidential friend, that for Lucy Spraggatt's sake he would do anything in the

wide world. He had never made any advances to Lucy, for, like most men of low pleasures, he was abashed in the presence of a modest girl, and it was long after his admiration for Miss Spraggatt was known to most of his intimates that he plucked up courage to speak to her brother on the subject.

Jack told him very frankly the objections he saw to the chance of Lucy accepting him for a lover, but Robert Hayes was ready to make oath there and then, that all which was objectionable should be amended, for the happiness of his life depended on her decision in his favour. Jack thought over the matter for a day or two, and generously put forward all the good qualities of the would-be suitor. He was industrious, steady, moderately good looking, and very well to do in the world. His faults were only those of a not over educated young man. There appeared, therefore, no reason why he should not make the venture, and it would rest with Lucy to refuse or accept his proposal. Accordingly Jack brought Robert Hayes home to dinner, and acting as a

good brother ought to do, tried to display his sister to the best advantage by exhibiting her household qualifications, and then to present her admirer at his best by directing the conversation into channels adapted to the flow of his ideas. Mr. Hayes floundered about considerably at first, and made a very indifferent dinner, appearing to have much difficulty in swallowing, even when taking a custard. The home-brewed of the Elms had a local reputation for excellence, and Mr. Hayes seemed inclined to draw his inspirations from the contents of a brown jug, with a silver rim.

Jack at last hit upon a subject on which he knew Mr. Hayes could talk, and his inquiry as to the pedigree of Ponto, Robert's favourite pointer, unloosed the young gentleman's tongue, and set his eloquence flowing.

“He's of the best strain in the country, Miss Spraggatt, if not in all England,” said Mr. Hayes. “His great-great-grandsire came direct from Spain, and he has as good blood in his veins as the King of England.”

“Not a very loyal comparison, Mr. Hayes,” remarked Lucy, not knowing what else to say.

“I beg pardon, Miss, but I think it is. That dog never makes a fault. If the ground’s as dry as a biscuit he never once runs over his game ; and I’d be bound if he made a point, and the game didn’t rise or run, he’d stand for a week—ay, until he was starved to death. Why last season”—and Mr. Hayes shot over again days upon days wherein Ponto had distinguished himself so greatly, that, according to his admiring master’s appreciation of his merits, he deserved to be chiseled in stone and set up in the market-place.

Jack mounted him next upon a favourite mare, and the excited orator rode his hobby for nearly half an hour, leaving Lucy much opportunity to reflect upon the acquirements and other recommendations of the speaker, although she did not anticipate to what end all this display was directed.

Lucy was country bred, and had an interest—a modified interest—in good dogs and horses, and in all, indeed, that pertained to the true sports of

the field ; but a young man whose knowledge and tastes appeared to have no further range than the stable and the dog kennel, did not excite in her gentle bosom the amount of admiration necessary to make a proposal of marriage acceptable. Jack Spraggatt perceived the ill success of the aspiring wooer, and after a short absence from the room was, therefore, not surprised to find Mr. Hayes looking the picture of despair at having had his hand and heart respectfully declined by Miss Spraggatt, who had very considerately retired to her own chamber after inflicting this necessary pain on her brother's visitor.

Jack having good-naturedly walked home with the unhappy Strephon, received a sisterly wigging on his return, for having been a party to such an absurd and embarrassing proceeding.

“ And now, my dear Jack,” said Lucy, “ a word or two as to the future. Should any other young gentleman make such a proposal to you again—it is not very likely, I own, but still it is within the range of possibility—I beg you to say that I have neither the wish nor the intention to marry. My

course—our course of duty—is clearly defined. We have to get out of debt, in the first place, and in the next we have to provide for the future. This will be my home so long as I can be useful in it, dear Jack, to you, and when you find another mistress to your liking, I will trust to your generosity to provide for me, for I shall never marry. There, that is what I want you to remember ; and that you may not forget it there is a beautiful kiss, one for each cheek, and I wish you a very good night, you bungling, dear old match-maker."

Jack was very glad that Lucy had rejected Robert Hayes. When he saw them sitting in the same room—when he heard him talking so rapturously about dogs and horses and nothing else, he felt that even Letty's French husband was a very desirable connection by comparison.

And yet he did not admire Lucy's parting words—"I shall never marry." Why not? No young girl of twenty makes such a declaration as that and means it, unless her young love has been stolen or given away unworthily. Jack puzzled over this riddle for more than four years, and

then never guessed it. He only knew it when the solution was told to him.

The knowledge of Lucy Spraggatt's refusal of Robert Hayes soon became public property by the liberal confidence of the rejected suitor, and nearly everybody blamed the young lady for her folly in not accepting such an eligible offer ; the more especially as old Hayes died shortly afterwards, and left Robert his son several thousands of pounds. Morden had its scandalisers, and some said the Spraggatts had always been thought a little too proud owing to their London connections, and Jack's intimacy with Gerard Norgold, who had turned out such a bad fellow ; and though no one could remember any exhibition of this objectionable quality, so far as themselves were concerned, yet they all had heard somebody else say so, and therefore it must be true. Where there was smoke there was sure to be flame. Stupid old adage.

However, the nine days' wonder soon passed away, and there was another subject of popular discussion which retained its interest for a much

longer period of time. It was another windfall for lucky Jasper Jellifer. Old Hayes had appointed him the guardian of his younger son William, with an allowance of £150 a-year until the lad should be of age, when he would come into possession of £2000, left to him by his maternal grandfather. What perplexed every one was the reason that Mr. Hayes had selected Jasper for such a trust; but the old man had been a frequent visitor to the shop in the market-place, and as his son's "goings on" had been usually uppermost in his mind, Jellifer had been favoured with a knowledge of the case, and gave such excellent advice as to what he would do with so rebellious a subject, that old Mr. Hayes walked one day direct to his lawyer's, and added a codicil to his will, appointing Jasper guardian to his son. Young William objected strongly at first to this disposition of his person; but as he was a great trouble at home, his brother and his father's executors insisted on submission, and he was therefore domiciled with the lucky Jasper. Not that there was much to be made out of the £150

a-year, but there were possible contingencies to arise hereafter, quite unseen and unthought of by every one except by clever Jasper Jellifer.

We must be of those, kind reader, with whom "time gallops withal," and pass over another year until the time when Gerard Norwold would (if living) have been twenty-three years old, and, in accordance with the custom of the Norwold family, have attained his majority. That day had been often spoken of by the dwellers in Morden and at Norwold Hall as one when there was to be great merrymakings, as there had been in other days, and from time out of mind. But there was a cloud over the great House, and those who remembered the day as an anniversary of the birth of its heir, shrugged their shoulders, or spoke sadly or disparagingly of the departed Gerard. In one household, however, he was remembered as his kindly, generous nature entitled him to be regarded, and with a strange combination of joy and sorrow. Jack Spraggatt would not believe that he was dead, although the closest inquiries had failed to discover the slightest trace of him

after he had quitted the cottage of his old nurse, who had also gone none knew whither. That circumstance gave the Spraggatts and other of Gerard's friends hope that the evidence found on the bank of the river was a device to deceive those who might be interested in his fate, and Jack declared a determination, for his own part, to keep Gerard's birthday as though he were with them in the flesh. He would have the church bells rung, and give a bullock to be roasted, and have a meeting of all the Norwold tenants at the principal Inn in the market place, and defy the family anger. Lucy, however, dissuaded him from all this. She, too, could not bring herself to believe that their dear friend had played such a cowardly part as to free himself from the sorrows of the present by breaking God's canon against self-murder. Nevertheless, there was no proof that he was living, and such rejoicings would have been a mockery of the dead, provided he was dead. Again, she urged, such a display of friendly rejoicing could not be desired by Gerard, or he would have taken means to have communi-

cated his present condition to some relative or friend. No—he had vowed in the paroxysm of his grief never to claim kindred with his father's house, and though those words were uttered rashly, Lucy believed that they would bind Gerard to their fulfilment unto his dying hour. Jack yielded to the reasoning of his sister, and they resolved to observe the day as they did the anniversaries of the deaths of their father and mother, not sorrowfully, but resignedly and in the belief that the grave was but the portal to a world where love would be eternal. So Gerard was lovingly remembered on that day, and as he was for many long years to come.

Again and once again we must turn over the hour-glass of time, and end for some years our visits to the Elms, as that once happy home-circle was destined to be broken, and by his hands who had made it such a pleasant abiding-place for so long. Jack Spraggatt, Jack Spraggatt ! the bark you are about to steer over thousands of miles of the great sea will be freighted with the whole happiness of your loving sister's life, and

woe to your own if you make shipwreck of your venture.

The morrow would be Gilbert Norwold's birthday, when he would be twenty-three, and the possessor of all the wealth his mistaken father could bequeath to him. There was to be some show of rejoicing at the Hall, but as neither Lady Norwold nor the young heir had made themselves many new friends since Sir John's death, and had kept but little intercourse with their old ones, the day did not promise to have much hearty enjoyment in store for those who were to take part in the festivities.

We shall have to accompany Jasper Jellifer to the Hall in our next chapter, and therefore for the present we will linger at the Elms. The more especially as Lucy has to meet a new wooer, one who will press her earnestly for her love, although he has a place in her heart already. Will she refuse him as she did Robert Hayes? Perhaps not, as her suitor now is—her brother Jack.

The postman had brought a letter to the Elms

—a full-bodied responsible-looking letter, and the post-mark was New South Wales. Jack had but one friend in that distant land he knew, and therefore he did not puzzle himself much to divine the sender, although the handwriting of the superscription was unknown to him. When he opened it and read on, the calligraphy became quite familiar to him, and he was obliged to pause more than once or twice, indeed many times, before he could finish that long, long letter. There was much on those sheets of paper which told of great suffering and hard struggles, ending in successful mastery of difficulties, and a future of promising prosperity. For such revelations Jack was not unprepared when he knew who was the writer, but of that which came after he had never dreamed in all the times when he had thought of the after-fortunes of his sister Lucy, and he was fairly puzzled how to proceed.

Two years had passed since Mr. Hayes had received his credentials as suitor for the hand of Lucy, but the words she had then spoken had come back to her brother's mind again and again :

“I shall never marry.” How those words had perplexed him at the time they were uttered we have already chronicled, and he was not wiser now as to their meaning. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to take counsel with Lucy herself after he had read the greater part of his long letter again, and so when they were seated by a bright fire early in the evening, Jack produced his budget.

“I have received,” he said, “a long letter from an old friend this morning from New South Wales.”

“Oh, yes—our old playmate!” she answered.
“I trust that he is well and prospering as usual.”
“Yes, dear, our friend is prospering bravely, after many difficulties and many trials.”

Jack then read from his letter much that we shall know if we wait for the end, and then he came to a part which concerned Lucy more nearly than any letter she had heard read in all her happy life. The writer said:—

“And now, my dear friend, my head fails me—my heart almost fails me when I need them both

more than ever I have done since I could think or feel. I have told you all that I can remember of my sufferings and trials and of my present prosperity. I ought, I fear, to make an end, but I can see before me two futures; one a life of ungratifying toil, another of honest exertion rewarded by the peace of home, and the happiness of an assured love. Should I hesitate in an endeavour to secure the happiest because I may be subjected to more pain, more regrets than I have yet endured? Would it not be cowardly to do so? Believing that I hear you answer 'Yes,' I now make my venture, praying with the whole strength of my soul, that God's blessing will be with my imperfect words.

"There was one I left behind me in the land of my kindred that I believed to be possessed of all womanly virtues, and you believing that also, can understand how nearly my friendship had become love. It needed but what has passed to destroy the only impediment to the stronger development, and the change came. It came, and I despised myself for the miserable thoughts which had kept

my love down, and would have stifled it, 'had I not known tribulation.'

"The more I dwelt upon the excellence I had had so long about my path, and yet had estimated only in part, my own demerits rose so strongly to my mind that I felt the poverty of all that I could ever hope to offer in exchange for the treasure I coveted, and—I despaired.

"As time went on my love grew and grew, until it has come to be too great a burthen to be borne in silence, and I now ask you, dear Jack, dear friend, to lend me help in this great need. I dare not write down what I am, for my faults would outnumber my few virtues. You must recall all your old friendship thought me to be, and tell it to her as truth, which coming from your lips she will believe.

"I dare not ask you to send away the light of your home, dear Jack—to send to this distant land the dearest treasure of your great brotherly heart, unless—what a momentous condition!—unless you find—how dare I write? I will be bold in despair, and say, unless Lucy loves me—

loves me well enough to leave all—even you, her happy home, old friends, old memories—and trust her future life to my care in this distant land. To come to me and make my life as happy as she has made yours.”

The letter contained many more passionate words, which were only intended to be known to Jack and Lucy, and would be read as foolishness by those whose hearts were not concerned in the perusal. It was signed George Warner, and the hand had trembled as it traced the letters which composed the name.

When Jack had finished reading, Lucy knelt down at his knees, and taking his hand in hers, pressed it to her lips. Her touch was as cold as death. “Dear brother,” she said, “what you have read to-night must never be read to me again. I have already told you—I told you what I had determined upon as my course of duty, and that—and that I should never marry.”

“Ah! but that was Robert Hayes.”

“Do not interrupt me, please, dear Jack, until I have ended. You must not read that letter to

me any more, nor must you ever speak to me again about it. I am but a weak woman—with a woman's nature, and such words and thoughts as you have read may affect my peace and make my life a sorrow. Two have passed away out of this house, and whose love watched over us to increase our joys and lessen our sorrows. We two are left alone, dear Jack, and thank God we are not divided by distance or death. If it be decreed that we should part, it must be by the hand which directs all things, my dear, dear, brother."

"I think I understand you Lucy," said Jack, "my heart would be a stone did I not understand you, and refuse the sacrifice you are making for my sake. I never until to-day suspected even that—that he loved you, nor did you I am certain. I never knew until this night that you loved him."

"No! no!" cried Lucy, "I have said nothing to make you infer that."

"Nothing plainly, I grant," said Jack, "but do you think that I am blind, Lucy. That I cannot see all the love in your heart. As I look in your

face, now pale as snow, now red as fire. If you have hidden this love, you have acted womanly—wisely, because it might have been unprized and unasked for. But now you know how it is sought and valued, it is your brother's duty to see that you do not wrong yourself."

"I never loved him, Jack; never, had a warmer feeling than——"

"Was proper and right. I know that," interrupted Jack. "Dear Lucy, do not trifle with your love, do not believe that you can ever stifle it in your heart, or that time or anything else can entirely conquer it. No, darling, no. You think it overcome, you think it dead, you fancy it will be forgotten; but some trifling thing, a flower, a song, a word, a well-known place, and back it comes again as strong as ever."

"You only say what you have read or fancied," said Lucy, coldly. "You must have felt love to know what it really is, I have heard say."

"And I have felt it, Lucy—feel it now," replied Jack. "Would that it were not so. No man loved more truly, more fondly than I loved one;—you

remember,—I think she would not have rejected me, and, if I had spoken, I might have found a loving answer. I did, I do love her, though it is almost guilt to do so now. I do not blame her. She must have thought me vacillating, cold, insensible, to have avoided her as I did, and I was glad, yes, I was glad for a time when she married, because I fancied no thought of me, nothing which I had said or done, had touched her heart and could ever make her unhappy.”

“Why did you neglect her? Why did you, knowing your own feelings, lead her to believe that she was indifferent to you?” asked Lucy, with much excitement in her face and manner.

“Because my father died, and I saw the change, the struggle that was before me. I knew that I had debts to pay, difficulties to overcome, for the sake of those who had a prior claim upon my love and my exertions.”

“And shall I not remember the lesson you have taught me, dear, dear brother,” cried Lucy, throwing her arms around his neck. “Shall I

forget for any selfish love that dear old Jack has bruised his honest heart to do his duty; that he has waking nights that might bring desponding days, if there were not one to see his sorrow and use her best skill to cure it. Leave you! No, not to be queen of the world!"

"That's —— nonsense!" (Yes, he did! It was very wrong, but knowing what Jack meant, the recording angel wrote it down beside Uncle Toby's oath.) "My difficulties are nothing now, my creditors are nearly paid, my prospects for the future are brighter, and my spirits and my self-reliance are now equal to anything."

"It is no use, my dear Jack, trying to dissolve our partnership," said Lucy, smiling. "We have still *our* difficulties, *our* creditors, and *our* prospects. You may have a very high opinion of your clever friend abroad, and his log house and his bush-farming, but I am quite contented with my stupid scheming brother, the dear old Elms and a tabby cat. So, go pull off your boots, put on your slippers, and get your pipe, whilst I brew you such a glass of gin-punch as will make you

ashamed of this shabby attempt to get rid of your housekeeper."

Jack felt himself out-generated, and therefore he obeyed the commands of his conqueror, glad that the terms of capitulation were so agreeable. He might have been required to have dried up Lucy's tears, or to have fumigated her out of hysterics. Lucy exerted herself to prevent the conversation turning into the forbidden channel, but Jack was evidently crest-fallen at his defeat, or scheming how he could resume the offensive. Lucy, perhaps, suspected as much, and when the old clock growled as it was wont, before striking ten (or any other hour), she gave Jack his good-night kiss and prepared to leave the room.

"Just one question," said Jack. "You are positively determined never to marry?"

"Positively, dear boy—I—will—never—marry. Good night."

"Good night," said Jack, as Lucy left the room. "You never—will—marry," imitating Lucy's manner. "Very well. Now hear me, ye old beams and rafters that for so many years

have covered the heads of the Spraggatts, by the last sip of punch remaining in this old tumbler, I will make her marry; and more, I'll make her marry the man of my choice."

The gin-punch had been more potent than usual, perhaps, but that tyrannical brother repeated his terrible threat as he put on his nightcap preparatory to getting into bed.

CHAPTER XI.

GILBERT ATTAINS HIS MAJORITY.—THERE ARE STRANGE MERRY-MAKINGS AT NORWOLD HALL.

THE festivities at the Hall on the morrow were to be very limited, merely extending to a dinner-party of some of the neighbouring gentry, and a few additions to the servants' table. The snow which began to fall promised from the appearance of the clouds to continue throughout the night, and would necessarily make travelling disagreeable and difficult, and the unconsidered inhabitants of Morden prognosticated a limited attendance at the old Hall, wherein great merrymakings had been held in olden times. Jasper Jellifer had obtained from the executors of Sir John the much-coveted collectorship, and now became nervously anxious as to his possible retention of the office under the new reign about to commence on the morrow, the more so as a smart London gen-

tleman, who had been located for some days at one of the inns in the market place, had paid two or three visits to the Hall, besides making a great many impertinent inquiries concerning the tenements and various properties on the Norwold estate. Jasper, we know, was a shrewd man, and he came to believe that the smart London gentleman might possibly be preparing himself to supplant him in the position he had occupied during the past three years. This notion had no sooner possessed him than he set about devising measures for his own security, and early in the morning Jasper Jellifer trudged through the deep snow to Norwold Hall. The family had been early astir, and therefore he found easy access to Mr. Gilbert Norwold, who, having had breakfast, was sitting in the library conversing with his mother through an open door which led into the little room where Jasper had had his former interview with her ladyship. Gilbert Norwold had not passed unscathed through the fiery furnace which he had kindled with his own hands, for time had brought no repentance, and he had sought in a freer

indulgence in his old vices, forgetfulness of the past. He succeeded often in hushing the still small voice that will be heard at most unwelcome seasons, and amid the most unlikely scenes for the intrusion of such a monitor, and the consciousness that this appeal might be heard when least expected, made him more reckless in his pleasures, and impatient of restraint in his pursuit of them. He inherited somewhat of his father's irritability of temper, and his own unquiet mind rendered him petulant, dogged, or morose, as circumstances affected him, and therefore his society was as little courted in the world as it had been when he was at college. He was sensible of his unpopularity, and at times the knowledge stung and mortified him into such retaliation as his selfish and cunning nature enabled him to inflict, and had he been as needy as he was revengeful, he would have been a desperate man to his own cost as well as to that of others. All this was known to Jasper, who nevertheless sought the present interview with less trepidation or misgiving of success than he had

experienced when he first asked for the appointment which he was about to solicit again.

"Well, Mr. Jellifer," said Mr. Norwold, "what brings you here so early?"

"In the first place, Mr. Norwold," replied Jasper, smiling his best, "I will venture to offer you my heartiest congratulations on this auspicious day, and to wish——"

"Thank you. Some other business I conclude brought you here?" asked Gilbert, curtly.

Jasper bowed, and smiled again as he said, "Certainly, sir, or I should not have dared to have intruded upon you. For nearly four years, sir, I have had the honour to collect the rents of certain properties in Morden, and to the satisfaction, I believe, of your late excellent father's executors and your trustees."

"I have heard nothing to the contrary," said Gilbert.

"I therefore have ventured to hope that now that the property has passed into your own hands, I may be permitted to retain the collection of the rents."

“ You are a sharp man of business, Mr. Jellifer, a very sharp man of business, as I have reason to remember; but early as your application is made, another has been before you,” replied Gilbert.

Jasper was not so much startled or disturbed by this announcement as might have been supposed.

“ But though the application has been made,” said Jasper, “ I presume it has not been granted.”

“ Why do you presume so?” replied Gilbert, sharply.

“ Because,” and Jasper spoke in a low tone, glancing at the open door as he did so; “ because I cannot believe that you would have quite forgotten the small services I have rendered you when they were so much required.”

Gilbert rose and closed the open door before he replied.

“ For those services, Mr. Jellifer, you were liberally paid. To what they led you no doubt remember, and it is partly because you do so, and partly because I require assistance now, that I contemplate making my London agent the receiver also of my country properties.”

“ You only contemplate, then,” said Jasper. “ You have not decided. I am glad of that, because I think you will find me equally useful in all ways.”

“ You have profited by success, I see, Mr. Jellifer, and can be pertinacious instead of obsequious, as formerly.”

“ I can be of use to you, Mr. Gilbert,” said Jasper, with a smile; “ and will be, if you will allow me.”

“ As you are persistent I must be positive,” replied Gilbert. “ I decline to continue you as my agent. I am afraid of you.”

“ You need not be,” said Jasper, with perfect coolness, “ if you use me fairly.”

“ Fairly, sir !” replied Gilbert, reddening with anger. “ Use you fairly ! I have always done so, and shall hear no more.” He again rose and went towards the bell.

“ Stay, Mr. Norwold ! a very few minutes, and I have finished. The Miller Ray——”

“ The scoundrel ! the villain !” cried Gilbert. “ How dare you speak of him to me ? ”

“Because I desire to speak of him to *you*, and to no one else,” answered Jasper. “If I leave this room deprived of the appointment I have now enjoyed for four years, I shall depart an injured man to my thinking.”

“And what then, fellow?” asked Gilbert, loudly.

“Why, then, I will not answer for myself. Injured men brood over their wrongs; and I might do so over mine. I might be led to speak of what I would not utter even within this room.”

“What can you say that I should care the world to hear?” asked Gilbert. “That to pay some youthful follies I was fool enough to apply to you; that you introduced me to your friend, the scoundrel Ray, and that I had to obtain from my mother the loan of a bracelet, which the villain sold, or pawned, or made away past recovery. You have been paid the sum I borrowed under that mysterious bond of yours. It was lucky for you, I fancy, that a closer inquiry was not made into that transaction——”

“Pardon me, Mr. Norwold, that would not be my story,” answered Jasper, his lips livid with suppressed anger.

“No! what then, Mr. Jellifer?” asked Gilbert, speaking loudly as he had done during the latter part of this interview.

“I should say, sir, that wanting this money most pressingly you had come to me, who was too poor to help you, that you then sought the assistance of the stranger Ray, who mistrusting your ability to pay, demanded security. That by the aid of false keys you entered your father’s house, that you returned with a bracelet, how obtained your dead father has declared, that one of a bunch of keys given you by Ray fitted your mother’s cabinet, for the officer Higgler found the keys after a long search in your father’s park, and at my suggestion. That you stood by and heard your brother accused of a theft which you could have disproved, and did not. This I might say, Mr. Norwold, under the remembrance of injuries, but which I will carry with me to the grave, if I am fairly used by you. Pray, sir,

consider if I cannot serve you. Money if you need; secrecy if you desire it."

During the culmination of this speech Gilbert's hand sought something in the drawer of the table at which he sat. At the conclusion when Jasper's voice and manner changed to their usual subserviency, Gilbert hurled behind him some heavy substance, and which the other did not affect to observe. Dreadful thoughts had passed through the mind of Gilbert Norwold; and many minutes were required to chase them away completely, as he walked to and fro without regarding Jasper Jellifer.

As soon as Gilbert could obtain sufficient command over himself to allow him to speak, he turned abruptly upon Jasper, and said—

"Who told you that disgraceful story? Was it Ray? It was that cold-blooded villain! Or were you a party to the whole scheme, Mr. Jellifer?"

Jasper protested that it was not until after Ray's conviction that he had been made acquainted with the circumstance, and when he

had vainly urged the miller to disclose to whom the bracelet had been consigned.

Gilbert paused again for some moments, still pacing the room as though he were taking time to enable him to make his next inquiry.

“Did Ray—did Ray communicate this story—to my—to any one beside yourself, Mr. Jellifer?”

Jasper saw that the arrow which he had shot had struck over the barb, and was fixed for ever, and so he answered—

“You mean to Sir John? No, sir.” That was a lie, and Jasper knew it to be so.

Gilbert paused in his walk, and beckoning Jasper to him, pointed to a small pistol lying upon the ground. “You see that instrument of death, Mr. Jellifer, you might have seen me cast it away some minutes ago. Can you guess why I took it from my drawer?”

Jasper fixed his eyes full upon Gilbert’s, and said quite calmly, “Perhaps with the intention of destroying me, the sole depository of your secret.”

“No,” said Gilbert, “I am not so mad as that.

I have thought again and again that a day might come when some voice, from the grave even, would proclaim the story of my shame and guilt as you have narrated it this day. I thought also, that should such a revelation ever be made I would not live, and that weapon was provided for my own death. I have heard my crime, my shameful crime, described with all its miserable details, and have cast away the instrument of death and dare to live. I have heard how terrible the story sounds from your lips, and will never hear it again if it be possible to buy your silence. You shall have all you ask, more if I have ever the power to grant it. Your interests shall be bound up with my own. I know I cannot touch you nearer, Jasper Jellifer. Let us meet as seldom as possible. Is this agreed between us?"

Jasper was a shrewd man, and saw at once that as his object was gained, he had better close the interview. "The confidence you place in me shall never be abused, Mr. Gilbert, and if I have spoken too plainly I hope you will pardon me. I am a

self-seeking man I know, an unforgiving man I grieve to own, and had I left you with a sense of wrong, I know not into what I might have been betrayed. You have trusted me, Mr. Gilbert, and there is no power on earth, no temptation of advantage which can now make me unfaithful to your interests. Good day, sir."

Jasper bowed respectfully, and without waiting to speak to any one, took his way homeward through the snow, which fell so fast that his footsteps were soon obliterated by the stainless flakes, and yet his track round about the house of Norwold could be traced for many years to come.

As Jasper left the room, Gilbert heard a low, rustling noise at the door which led into his mother's apartment, and on opening it he was startled to find her lying in a swoon close beside it.

"She has been listening," Gilbert thought. "What has she heard, I wonder? Enough I fancy to make her regret her meanness." He raised her up, and having placed her in a chair,

rang the bell, which was answered by Lady Norwold's maid.

“Your mistress is not well, Jackson,” said Gilbert, “I will send the housekeeper to you, and when her ladyship recovers let me know.”

He made his way to the billiard-room, where some of the persons staying in the house were amusing themselves; wondering as he went why he had never divulged the truth to his mother, feeling how little he was disturbed now by the supposition that she had listened to the story told by Jasper. He had become less frightened at his sin now that he knew he had a sharer in the guilty secret.

More than an hour elapsed before he was summoned to his mother's apartment. He found her looking very pale, but exhibiting a constrained cheerfulness which he did not care to disturb by any inquiries, and neither of them referred to the event of the morning but in the most general terms.

The snow still fell fast and continuously, as some of the guests who lived near to the Hall

arrived. It needs a warm-hearted friendship to take men and women from comfortable firesides on a rough snowy winter's night, miles away, to meet old familiar faces, and how much more to a formal dinner-party. The Norwolds were not surprised, therefore, that when dinner was announced as served, many of their invited friends were absent. Few trifles have a more depressing influence on an assembly than a dinner-table around which there are vacant chairs, and not even when the expected guests are despised of, can the best Amphitryon rally the flagging spirits of his party. Lady Norwold seemed incapable of making an effort to overcome the effect produced by the absence of her friends, but looked more like the skeleton at an Egyptian feast than the proud mother of a son attaining his majority. She was still very pale, and every effort she made at conversation seemed painful to her. Her friends attributed her condition to disappointment at the absent, and kindly strove to cover her deficiency as hostess by chatter among themselves. Gilbert, also, was ill at ease, it was evident,

but having his feelings more under control, he soon mastered his mortification at what his guilty conscience made him suppose, the intentional slight of his absent guests, rather than a necessity imposed upon them by the weather. And so passed the dinner until the family orator rose to propose the health of the youthful host, and as he was a man of many words, and set phrases, he repeated those fulsome panegyrics which we were wont to hear after dinner, and still read upon tombstones. The toast was drunk with enthusiasm by those assembled to do honour to the occasion. One only could not pledge the heir - perhaps of Norwold, but there she sat with a fixed gaze and livid lips powerless to moisten them with the cool wine in the glass before her. Not even the shouts and clapping of hands which hailed her son a man broke her dreaming, and it was only when tears rushed from her heart into her eyes that she appeared conscious of her place in this, by her, long desired ceremony. None there doubted the cause of her tears and of the succeeding weakness. Was she not Gilbert's

widowed mother? Had he not been the idol of her life, to whom she had offered up all the woman's love her heart contained? Was not this day one to be noted and remembered all her life long? Ah! yes, it was never forgotten until all else passed into oblivion with it. It was remembered daily, almost hourly, but in silence. No word recalled its morning or its evening in any after conversation with Gilbert; and when she had learned to pray, taught by her broken hopes and her chastened selfishness, she entreated pardon and blessings for her son.

There was mirth and to spare in the servants' hall, for those good men and women bear complacently enough the sorrows and mortifications of their masters and mistresses. Why should they do otherwise? They are not paid for their sympathies, and are soon taught "that service is no inheritance." There are exceptions to this teaching. Good servants, who reckon kindly words and actions as matters to be accounted for at the ending of each day, and just masters, who consider the services of an active and devoted

youth as debts to be cancelled only by a generous care of a less profitable old age.

It was a Norwold custom to brew a hogshead of strong ale on the birth of a son to the house, and this brewage was not tapped until the infant arrived at his majority. This ceremony had been duly performed by the old butler, and the strong liquor produced in the servants' hall in a veritable black jack, which, it was said, had performed a similar duty when the first knight of Norwold won his spurs. The potency of the liquor was soon declared by the increased clamour which followed the circulation of the black jack, and at last it became necessary to conduct the head keeper (whose once curly poll had grown grey in the service of the house) to his cottage in the park. As he was led by his subordinates beneath the windows of the dining-room, he could not be restrained from giving vent to certain opinions which he entertained, but which, from prudential considerations, he usually kept to himself. The strong ale would be heard to-night, and Gilbert, who had returned alone to the dining-room,

opened one of the windows to ascertain the cause of the riot, just as the keeper expressed himself to the following effect:—

“I say Mr. Gilbert bean’t a Norwold. Not a bit on’t. He don’t care a brass farden for shooting, ’unting, or fishing, and he han’t got a Norwold heart in ’um, I tell ’ee. Mr. Gerard was another guess sort of chap altogether! He’d a made the old please what it wor in his feather’s time—that is, when his feather was young and I was a boy! I tell ’ee what, Bill! Mister Gilbert is a bad ’un, and choused his brother as sure as my neam’s Joe. I never emptied a horn to-night as I didn’t say Mr. Gerard’s good health until he cooms back again—and back he’ll coom some day as sure as my neam’s Joe——” And then the tipsy mutterings of the old keeper were indistinguishable by the listening master, who felt a coldness about his heart that night—colder than the frosty air which had changed the breath of the guests upon the windows into fairy forest trees—as he knew the tipsy man had spoken the truth, and that it would be repeated again

and again, until it might be heard to his destruction. His first impulse was to dismiss from his service the ungrateful servant; but the question would be asked by his household, in Morden town, and at the market-table, why was old Joe the keeper sent away from Norwold Hall? and he dared not provoke the answer.

There had been merry-making also in the town of Morden, and the most noisy and the most intoxicated of the revellers was certainly Jasper Jellifer's ward, William Hayes. Jasper had done his duty honourably by the young satyr so long as he could control his conduct—all the neighbours said that. He carefully regulated his outgoings and incomings, and curbed his passion for drink, limiting his potations. Jasper managed this so adroitly that young Hayes vowed there was not a kinder, better fellow in the world than Mr. Jellifer. But when young Hayes came of age matters changed for the worst, and he was often seen in the mornings with bleared eyes and a flushed face. By-and-by his hands trembled, and rumours were abroad that

the doctor had been called in to repair, if possible, the ravages of his debauchery. Young Hayes was seldom seen in the market place, except on his way to one of the inns for his morning's draught, and which was frequently so deep that his steps were unsteady when he returned, although he rarely remained after mid-day.

At last the doctor was a very frequent visitor at Jasper's house, and then it was announced one day, to the surprise of no one in Morden, that young Hayes was dead—dead from drinking brandy continually.

Jasper's patience had been long worn out, and as he despaired of conquering the young drunkard's love of drink, he had retired from the contest, and yielded up to him the key of the cellar! Poor William Hayes, like Mad Tom, "found ratsbane by his porridge;" for brandy was his poison, and he took it and died.

Jasper had not suspected, he said, the consequences likely to follow his own goodnatured

imprudence, and would have taken this calamity greatly to heart, no doubt, had he not found an unexpected consolation. He was always a lucky fellow, and now he reaped the reward of the care and trouble he had bestowed on his late ward, William Hayes. The grateful drunkard had bequeathed to Jasper Jellifer all that he was worth, and which amounted, according to popular calculation, to nearly twelve hundred pounds. How all Jasper's windfalls fructified, blown down as they were at his feet, we shall see, if we have patience to wait for the end.

CHAPTER XII.

JACK SPRAGGATT SURPRISES HIS NEIGHBOURS,
AND SEES THE LAST OF NORWOLD HALL.

JACK SPRAGGATT, much to his credit, had been very unmindful of his sister's injunctions, and had frequently pleaded the cause of his absent friend, without, however, appearing to shake Lucy's determination in the least. He had not obtained the slightest admission that the proposal would have been acceptable to her under any circumstances, but fraternal love quickened the brother's perception, and he had satisfied himself that the happiness of Lucy was absolutely dependent upon a course of conduct opposed to that which she had declared her determination to pursue. Jack was an obstinate fellow when he believed himself to be in the right; particularly obstinate when he thought the best interests of others were under his influence, and at last he

determined to compel Lucy to accept the only man he had ever thought her capable of loving as a husband. Had he arrived at a correct estimate of his sister's feelings? He was sure of that, as he had found her frequently alone, and when her eyes gave evidence that she had been weeping; and he knew that she had no cause for any other sorrow than that which must have resulted from the struggle which she had so nobly maintained between her love for the absent and her sense of duty towards her brother. Jack, therefore, resolved upon a course of action which he knew would prove effectual in deciding this painful question, and in order to avoid any controversy with his sister he kept his plans to himself until it was quite beyond her power to controvert them.

He then communicated them to Lucy by affixing to the wall of their breakfast room a placard, headed

THE ELMS,

and whereon was set forth in varied types the startling announcement that Mr. Peter Mallett

was instructed by the respected tenant of that very productive and eligible farm to sell by auction the remainder of the lease, together with all the stock, live and dead, farm implements, and household furniture pertaining thereto, without reserve, on the last day of the month following.

Lucy was not quite unprepared for this announcement, as Jack had latterly thrown out vague hints that he had a duty also to perform, and that he would not have the self-reproach of having sacrificed the happiness of his sister to a sentimentality which could be manfully overcome.

“ You see, my darling,” he said, smiling, “ to what extremity you have driven me ; and though no loving heart but yours will greet me in the distant land to which we are going together, I shall leave none behind me from whom a separation would be a continual sorrow. I confess that the first sight of that great bill sent a pang to my heart, but that has passed away, and the few regrets which will remain when I shall look upon this old house for the last time, will be compensated

for a thousand fold, by the conviction that the beloved dead would approve an act which will pluck from my sister's life that ever rankling thorn—a love unsatisfied."

Lucy's head was resting on his bosom as he said this, and the look which filled her face when she turned it up towards his, told him that he had read truly the secret of her heart, and that she was as grateful as she was happy.

The little world of Morden was busy enough when the knowledge that the Spraggatts were to be sold up, became general, conjecturing, and inquiring as to the cause for such an unlooked-for event. The more the gossips discussed the subject the more perplexed they became, especially as Jack always appeared to be in the highest spirits, and the best of humours. More than one friend who had stood by the Spraggatts in their recent troubles, were ready to help again if that were needed ; but Jack only thanked them from the bottom of his full heart, and assured them that he should be free from debt and have plenty to spare, when all at the Elms had been

knocked down to the highest bidders. There were, however, exceptional times when Jack was not so cheerful, and when big sighs and grave looks betrayed the latent pain which comes with a broken home. There are many living memories associated with household things which make the insensate materials almost as dear as though they had life and feeling, and one could sometimes resent their rough handling, and indifferent estimate by the callous broker, who sees in them only lots to be dispersed according to conditions of sale, leaving behind them a residuum of commission for selling to be paid by the purchaser. Poor Jack had more than one sharp struggle before he would consent to surrender an old chair or table, or piece of ancient crockery that had home legends tacked to it, and some few matters were found to be too sacred to be permitted to pass into strangers' hands, and were crowded away into Jack's little counting-house, to be carried to the new home, wherever that might be, giving infinite trouble, and costing ten times their value in transport by sea and land.

They were held to be more precious for their cost, and were worth the money and anxiety, bringing back as they did for years and years, pleasant remembrances of departed loved ones, and of the old house at home.

Lucy shared in all these weaknesses, but knowing for whom this great household sacrifice had been made, she hid her own emotions from Jack, and went about her necessary work bravely, not showing how hard it was to part with so many old familiar things until the morning of the sale, when she prepared to leave the Elms to stay with a neighbour; and then she lingered about the rooms which had echoed to now silent feet, and to her own voice from childhood to that day, until she thought (but only for a moment), that the future should be indeed a bright one that could compensate for this severance, as it were, from a past so full of remembered happiness. She wept very sadly as she knelt down in the chamber wherein her parents had died, and repeated the simple prayers she had said at her mother's knee, as though she had hoped to hear

that mother's voice blessing her again, as it used to do when she laid her down to rest.

Jack saw something of Lucy's sorrow, and avoided her—great, stupid, coward that he was—and went out busying himself in doing nothing particular, until Lucy was driven off in their neighbour's gig. He then went back alone into the house, and looked very red and flustered when he came out again.

The stock, both live and dead, had a good reputation, and the persons who came to purchase were numerous and respectable. There were plenty of idlers, also, for there are many people who flock to a sale, as others do to a funeral, and not always from the most charitable motives. If there were any present who came to rejoice over the dead fortunes of the Spraggatts, they must have been mystified to have seen how Jack bore himself. He cracked jokes with some, descended to others all the prime qualities of his favourite breeds of sheep and oxen, and exhibited his samples of grain with as much cheeriness as he had ever done at the market-cross, and when

prices were rising. He was selling himself off because it pleased him, and so thoroughly enjoyed the fun, that no doubt he could have mounted the auctioneer's rostrum, in the parlour, or its peripatetic substitute, the wheel-barrow, out of doors, and knocked down his own lots. It was customary, and perhaps, it may be so at present, to feed the competing buyers before the business of the day began, and Jack's guests were numerous and hungry enough. The slices of beef roast and boiled which disappeared were truly marvellous, and the home-brewed ale was neither weak nor sparingly supplied. Many a timid man who had set a very moderate price on some desired lot came forth a resolute buyer, and would not be outbid by any one who dared to compete with him. The bold became more bold, and paid liberally for their entertainment by "springing a little," when good-humouredly taunted by the auctioneer for "their want of speerit."

The small British farmer of other days was a dull fellow enough when met at his plough-tail, or at dung-carting, or in the harvest fields,

as dull as the oxen he drove, or the beasts he fattened. He knew nothing of phosphates and sulphates, and all the other great agents of agricultural chemistry, and would as soon have thought of threshing by steam as going up in a balloon to catch larks. He was contented to farm as his feyther had farmed afore him, and only knew that "plenty of muck, plenty of crop." He brightened up greatly on market days, whether he was buyer or seller, and it was difficult to dip your fingers into his leathern money bag more deeply than was conducive to his own interests. He worked hard for his money, and generally knew how to keep it. But he was brightest at a sale, where he always made up his mind to get a bargain if he could, and approached the object he desired very charily, taking shy looks at it, and never closely examining into its merits so long as a possible competitor was at hand. When he had satisfied himself of the desirableness of the commodity, he showed no further interest in it until it came under general notice, and then it was to ascer-

tain if others had as good an opinion of it as himself, and an intention to purchase. If he could say a word of disparagement, he did so, and then mostly retired to the outer circle, where he could catch the eye of the auctioneer without attracting attention to himself. His bids were always made by winks, and when the offers of others had nearly reached the limit of his estimate, he would thrust his hands into his pockets and take a few turns to keep down his rising anxiety. As the seller dwelt upon the last bid, he would return to his station, and wait until the hammer appeared descending finally before he winked again. He would then fix his eyes on the competing adversary, until it was evident that he would rather have pulled off his coat and fought out the difference between them. When fortunate enough to have been the purchaser, he usually gave his name with a blush, as though he were ashamed of his bargain, or had been detected in an act which reflected upon his prudence, and would expose him to the small wit of the market-table. He had bought a bargain,

be certain of that, and was no more to be blamed for his caution and cunning than the dowagers who decry the cracked china which they have commissioned Mr. Moses to buy at any sum.

The Spraggatt sale lasted three days, and the lots fetched excellent prices, but no one, not even Mr. Mallett, the auctioneer, could get at Jack's secret, for selling off ; this, he said, still remained "reserved" and was not to appear in the catalogue.

The three or four days immediately succeeding the sale were possibly the most painful Jack Spraggatt had ever known ! The cattle and other stock were driven away, and the stalls and sheds left empty. Well that had happened in part often enough before. The farm gear had been subject to change and removal, so let that go ! But those empty rooms ! Those terrible empty rooms which had been never without some dear face, some old familiar object since he could remember ! There were dirty foot-prints and littered straw then over the floor, and the bared walls were stained here and there with the marks

of picture, map, or weather-glass ! All gone to the homes of strangers, or to the broker's shop in the market place ! Jack blinded his eyes with his two closed hands, to shut out the desolation about him ; but the visions which he then saw, the phantasmagoria of what had been in those old rooms, were more than he could bear, and he walked out into the garden to the yew hedge, where he had been wont to go when his dark hours were upon him. And then he recalled his old struggles with the dreadful skeleton which he had buried at last, and remembered who had given him courage for the contest, and that he owed to her all the happiness of his life. Could he have remained indebted to her for so much when, by the sacrifice of so little, he could reverse their positions, and make her the debtor ? No ! a thousand times no ! and there was comfort in the thought.

The last evening that Jack Spraggatt was to pass at the Elms arrived, and closed in darkly and stormily. Lucy had gone to London to stay with some friends preparatory to seeking her new

home, and poor Jack might therefore be excused feeling lonely and depressed, in spite of all his philosophy. His thoughts had been occupied with the past more than with the future, and, at last, not being able to endure his solitariness any longer, (it had been his own election that he was alone), he put on a rough coat, and walked towards Morden. The market place was almost deserted, but the lights shone brightly in the shop windows, more dimly perhaps in those of the thriving Jasper Jellifer than in any other, as he had always been equally economical in oil and candles as in most other things. It was his shop, however, that Jack entered, but he found only Mrs. Jellifer at home, and that worthy lady's surprise was excusable when Jack asked for her husband, as his visits to them had been of rare occurrence at all times. Jellifer, she said, was down at the mill, which he had continued to tenant since Ray's forcible desertion of it, although it was seldom that the old wheel made its pleasant music. It was principally used as a store-house for some of the larger commo-

dities in which Jasper dealt, and its once pretty garden was now neglected, and its shrubs and evergreens allowed to grow wild. Thither Jack Spraggatt took his way, guided in some degree by the patches of unmelted snow which lay in the fields and by the roadside, as the night was dark. When Jack reached the mill, there was a light burning in the room where he and Ray had driven their hard bargain some few years before, and he could see through the uncurtained window that Jasper was engaged with some one within, whose figure, as he stood with his back to the window, was not altogether unknown to him. Without thinking of what he was doing, Jack continued a quiet spectator, and saw that Jasper was paying money, and for which he took no receipt. The man then turned to go, but as his face was partially concealed by the brim of his hat and a large neckerchief which he wore, Jack was no wiser than before as to his identity. The unconscious spy then became sensible of the impropriety he was committing, and being rather ashamed to be

detected in such a position, walked to the door as Jasper opened it to let out his visitor. The stranger threw a hurried glance as the light fell upon Jack, but contenting himself with observing, "A dark night, sir," walked away like one well acquainted with the road which led to the town. The voice, the figure, were both known to Spraggatt, but not sufficiently well to be recognised positively, and as Jasper made no reference to his departed friend, Jack, conscious that he already knew more than he ought to have done, was silent on the subject.

"You make your visits late to the mill, Mr. Spraggatt," said Jasper. "The last time I met you here, some years ago, I remember was at the same hour."

"You have a good memory, Mr. Jellifer," replied Jack; "and I remember also, you were in the garden when I came on business with that—man Ray."

"And to-night, have you come on business with me?" inquired Jasper, without asking Jack to sit down, although they had entered the parlour.

“I have, Mr. Jellifer, though you may possibly consider what I am about to say a little impertinent, but as we may not meet again, for some time, I hope you will excuse me.”

“Pray sit down, sir,” said Jasper, evidently a little confused, and desirous, perhaps, to recover his habitual coolness, adding: “I am sure you will not willingly offend me.”

“Certainly not,” replied Jack, “no honest man would be offended at what I am about to say; and I am sure you are—you will not be.”

Jack should have called Jasper an honest man, but somehow, he could not get the words to his lips.

“You remember, I am sure,” continued Jack, “the painful circumstances which occurred at Norwold Hall, some four years ago.” Jasper bowed. “You were fortunate to escape loss by what followed so soon after to the unfortunate man who then owned the mill.” Jasper bowed again, but more slightly than before. “I have never been able to disconnect those two events with each other,” said Jack, “although from the

strictest inquiries which I have made, I have learned nothing to justify me in doing so.” Jasper bowed again, but smiling as though he would imply, “he should think not,” and Jack paused, before proceeding to say more, as doubting how to put the question, he was desirous to ask, inoffensively. He was not very successful when he did speak.

“It was evident to every one, Mr. Jellifer, that you and Ray had much business together, and trusted each other in many things.”

“Mr. Spraggatt,” said Jasper, “I must remind you that Ray proved to be a thief, and the associate of thieves—I only knew him as a neighbour, who bore a respectable name, and to whom I foolishly entrusted my hard earnings.”

“All which you recovered, Mr. Jellifer,” replied Jack, not caring to be hood-winked by Jasper’s repudiation of Ray. “You came into possession of all the felon’s property, and with that—as I hope—some of his secrets.”

“I don’t understand you, sir,” said Jasper, in an offended tone.

“Pray don’t *misunderstand* me,” replied Jack. “I mean that you saw him more than once after his conviction, and after Higgler—by the bye did he not leave you to-night when I arrived?”

“No, sir,” answered Jasper, flatly.

“I am mistaken,” continued Jack. “I was about to say, after Higgler had tried in vain to obtain the knowledge that I now seek. You know, or you may have heard, that Mr. Gerard Norwold honoured me with his friendship.” Jack could not proceed for some moments. “I am ashamed of this weakness, but I loved him very dearly, and hold his memory very dearly also. I am about to leave England, perhaps for ever, and since I have taken my resolution to do so, I have thought again and again, that it would be a great satisfaction, to me and to my sister, if by any effort of mine his fair name could be restored to him.”

“His family and friends have not been idle to discover the means of doing so. I am sorry to add, without effect,” observed Jellifer.

“There is one person, possibly, who could do

him justice?" said Jack, fixing his eyes steadfastly on Jellifer.

"What man?" asked Jasper, compressing his lips closely together, as though to restrain any exhibition of anxiety.

"Possibly yourself, Mr. Jellifer," answered Jack; "or if not you, the person who still has possession of the diamond bracelet, which, as there is a heaven, Gerard never had in his possession."

"How do you know that?" asked Jasper, earnestly.

"Because Gerard has said it, and he was too noble for falsehood. The man who holds that bracelet could prove it also, possibly. There might be some slight incident connected with his possession of it, which would cast a clearer light than has been yet thrown on that dark transaction. Are you the man?"

"I am not the man," replied Jasper, with pardonable warmth. "You do me great injury in supposing that I could be the man."

"Pray forgive me, Mr. Jellifer; I ought not

to have encouraged such a thought; but as certain papers were found in this room that led to the terrible accusation of my dear friend, and as you became possessed of so much which had been Ray's, I hoped that you might—— I mean that for your own security—a pardonable fear of implication——”

“ I might have been as bad a man as Raymond Ray. I thank you, sir;” said Jasper, rising. “ I have hitherto borne an honest name, Mr. Spraggatt, and thought myself secure from such an insult as you have offered me.”

“ I cannot recall what I have said, Mr. Jellifer. If I have given you pain I am sorry for it. One question more, and I have done. As you will one day have to answer for all evil done in act or knowledge, I ask you if you know who does possess that bracelet ?”

Jack rose up as he spoke, and Jasper recoiled from him, as though he feared some violence; but seeing that his questioner had no such intention, he answered firmly—and truthfully—“ I do not know. I cannot even guess who had it.”

“Then the mystery must continue unresolved, and a fair name remain dishonoured,” said Jack, with great emotion. “It matters nothing to the dead, and little, I fancy, to the living; and so good bye, Mr. Jellifer. Let us part friends. Life is too short for evil thoughts or evil actions. Good bye, sir.”

They shook hands, and Jasper led the way to the door. The night was intensely dark, and as they walked to the garden gate, a sudden light shone for a moment and disappeared.

“Was that lightning?” asked Jellifer.

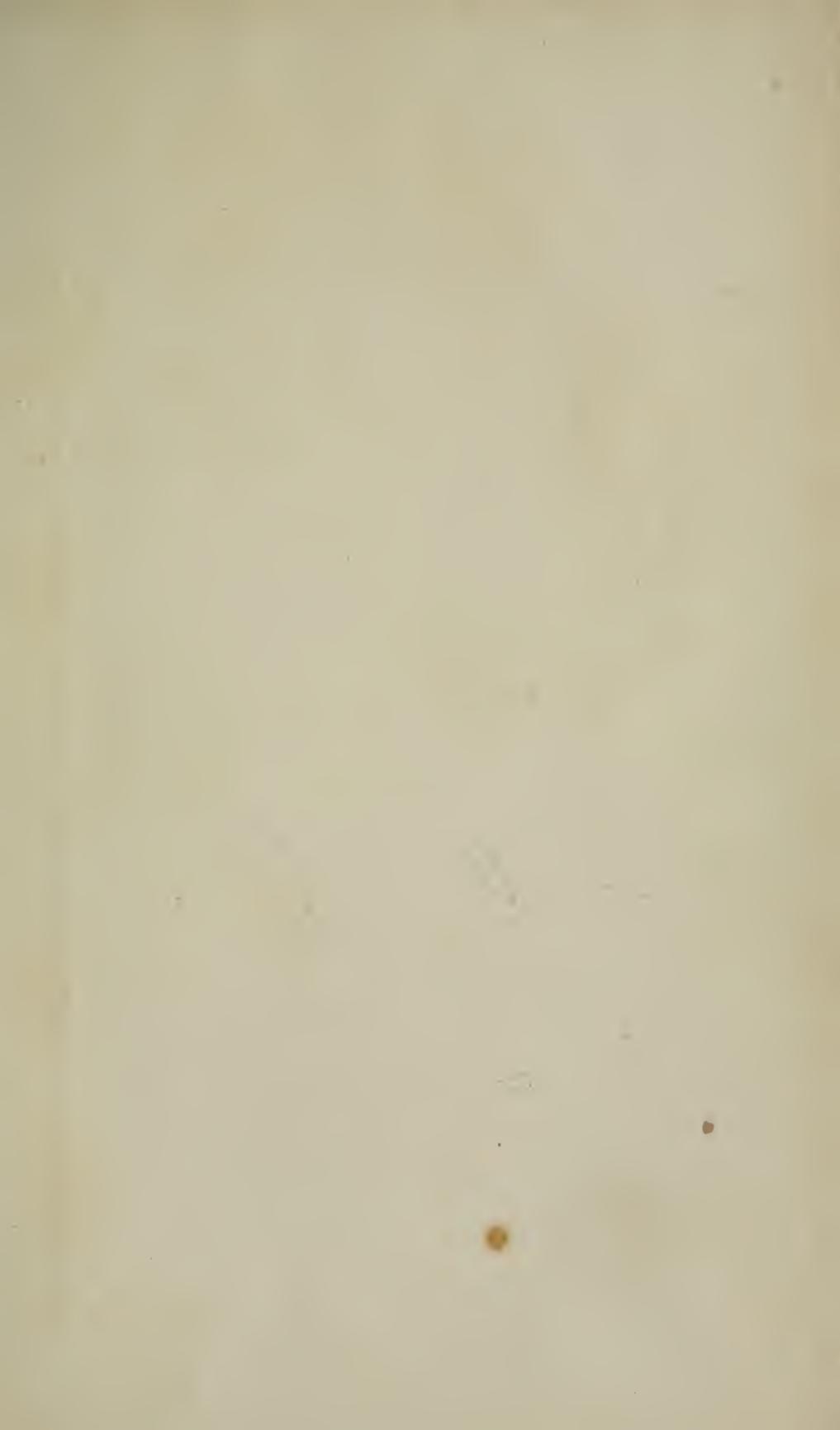
Before Jack could reply it shone again, but now continuously, and when they turned to find the cause, they saw that Norwold Hall was in flames. The first impulse of both men was to run to the burning house, but Jack Spraggatt went no further than the wicket which led into the park, and from which he could see the flames through the avenue of old trees, which now formed, as it were, a frame to the fiery picture.

“What should I care if every trace of that house wherein such wickedness has been done,

should perish in the fire! Let it burn; and may the injuries inflicted within its walls be forgotten and forgiven! Strange! strange! that my last walk to my old home should be by the light of such a torch as Norwold Hall!"

Jack took the road to the Elms, occasionally pausing to look back at the fire, and listen to the clanging of the church bells, as they were rung backwards, the inharmonious noise awakening the early sleepers, and rousing the convivial sitters in the town of Morden. Very soon every man's face was towards the burning Hall, and women and children ran beside them to see the great house on fire; but Jack Spraggatt turned his back upon the blazing mass which lighted up the heavens, and cast his shadow before him on the pavement of the old High Street, and the pathway beyond it, almost to the porch of the Elms, on the last night he was to call that old house by the name of home!

END OF VOL. I.



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